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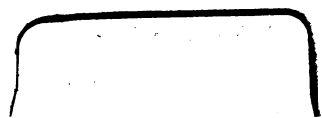


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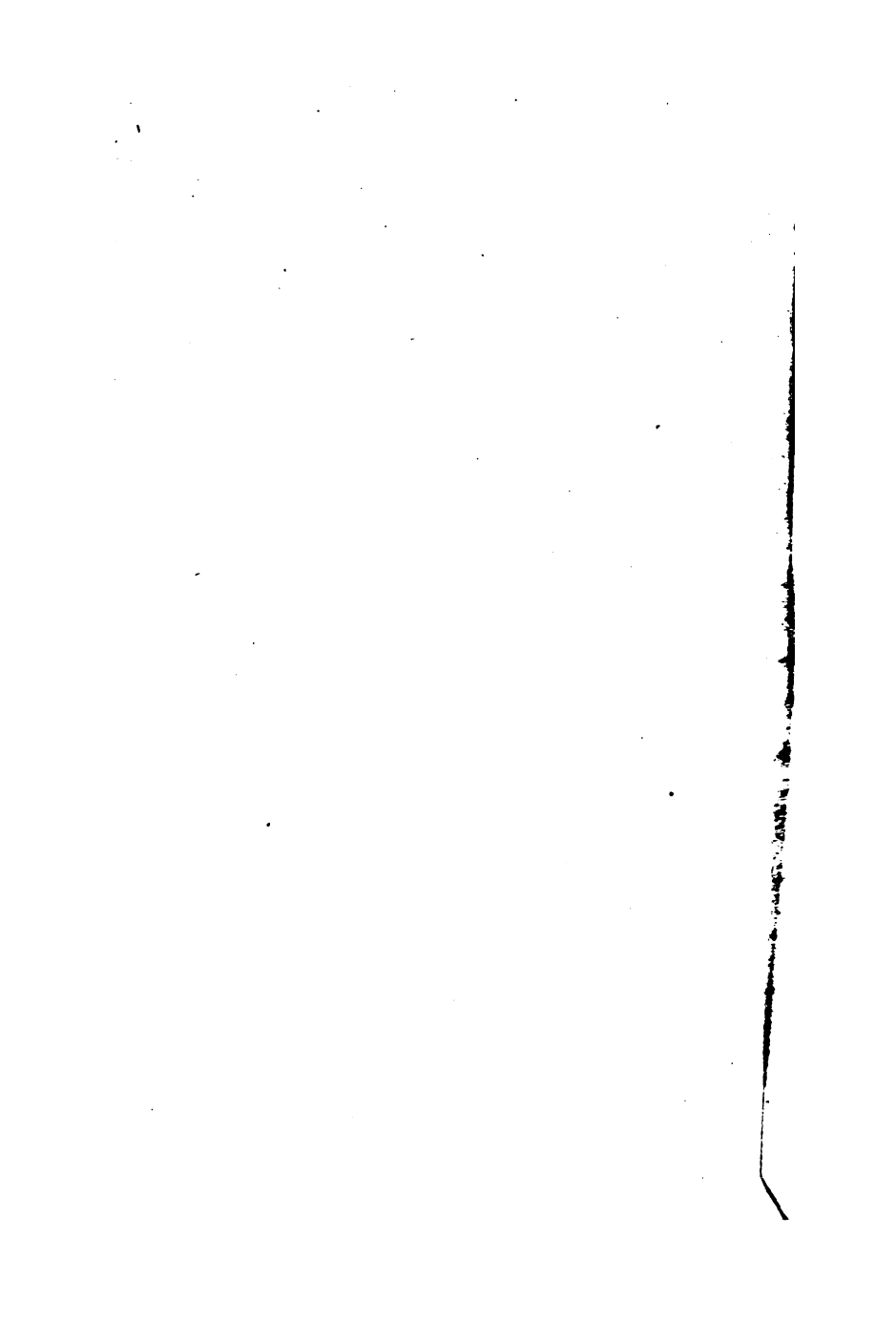
H.S. CANFIELD



From

Clanmoy

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A MAID OF THE FRONTIER.

PRESENTED
TO THE
ACTORS' FUND HOME.
—BY—

Clay Greene
1907

A MAID OF THE FRONTIER

BY
HENRY SPOFFORD ⁶⁰CANFIELD.



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TO MY MOTHER.
HENRY SPOFFORD CANFIELD.

A MAID OF THE FRONTIER.

CHAPTER I.

AT THE HALCOTT RANCH.

The horses' heads were down between their knees. The dried sweat hung on them in white flakes. Their backs were humped, legs wide apart and gait shambling and aimless. The enormous load of Texas saddle, gun, blanket, camp utensils, waterproof, rider and jingling spur crushed them into mere semblances of equinity. There was no road and the prairie was brown in the blistering sun. The straight rays launched down and the men felt the successive sickening plunges of heat. The air was breathless and shimmering, and refracted clouds wavered from the cracked earth. The hills around rose bare and rock-clad, their scarred sides giving token of the spring freshet, and down them trickled rivulets of dust. The sky was intense.

ly blue, and, slow-wheeling a thousand feet in the furnace air, a brace of yellow-trimmed vultures sailed round and round, with motionless wings. Miles away in the glare a line of sparse trees moved fantastically up and down with the jog of the horses. The men breasted the nearest white hill and rose painfully to its summit, mentally calculated the distance intervening and cast a despairing glance at the blinding prairie.

"That's Halcott's," said the elder, squirming uneasily in the saddle, "but we'll shore never git there. This here plug is the hardest-ridin' thing I ever backed—straight up-en-down, up-en-down—travil all day in the shade of one tree."

"Same here," responded his companion. "The only thing I like about it is, the derned rangers will have to make the same ride. Been ridin' an' sweatin' an' pantin' for near two days now, jus' to let that young feller know the soldiers need him. An' to help ol' Dan Halcott, too. Many's the time Dan has holped me."



"What did Hightower kill that man fur? Some says he were an off'cer from the ol' states, huntin' Charlie fur a row back there. I b'leve that myself. Leastways, I think I b'leve it."

"Thing uz this way," responded Canty. He was a younger man and spoke with more snap and assertiveness than his companion. "Thing uz this way. This here fool of a man come ridin' into Edwardsville on a big shiny Amerikin horse. He uz settin' in a big shiny new saddle an' he jingled a pair o' the bigges' shinies' spurs ever I see. He uz wearin' a shiny nickel-plated forty-five and a shiny gol' pin in a white shirt, I tell you, an' a red cravat. An' in July, too. Lord!" The speaker spat straight between his horse's ears and his hearer spat in unison.

"He put up at Red's hotel and started to run th' house. He drunk whiskey befo' dinner an' whiskey after dinner an' whiskey at bed-time. He chinned the barkeep mos' to death an' run the servant girls all over the place. William did tell me as how that

feller chinned him mos' to death. Then he went out in town an' hunted up the Sheriff.

"'Kin you tell me,' he 'lowed, 'ef a man named Hightower stops aroun' here? A right smart of a young man, with good clothes and great fur runnin' aroun',' says he.

"'Charlie Hightower,' says Mason, 'has been aroun' here fur the bes' part o' a year. He's a lawyer an' he makes a mos' pow'ful speech. He drinks with th' Judge, an' plays keerds with th' jurymen an' len's money to anybody as wants. An' he's mighty well liked out here, an' what might be yo' business?' says Mason.

"'I'm wantin' him,' says Shiny, ''cause he's a murd'rer an' embezzler an' hoss-thief.'

"'Ol' Tom Mason laughed when th' man 'lowed Charlie was a murd'rer an' took other folks' money, but w'en this here red cravat devil says, 'an' a hoss-thief,' he got mighty white in the face an' pulled at his beard an' spit out his terbacker an' says:

"'Hightower is off 'tendin' court, m'

fre'n, but w'en he comes back you kin talk to him. In the meantime, m' fre'n, you jus' drop whiskey an' rustle aroun' fur some sand. You take my word, you'll need two or three bucketfuls of it.'

"Shiny went off and laid aroun' fur two or three days drinkin' mo' whiskey an' jus' chinnin' th' barkeep plum to death. By-'n-by Hightower rode into town with his pockets full o' money. Befo' he got off'n his hoss forty people tol' him of a off'cer as said he uz a hoss-thief an' uz goin' to take him back to Georgy. Charlie laughed an' 'lowed none of 'em hadn't los' no hoss by him sence he come to Edwardsville; an' then he went in his office an' shut the door. Soon he come out agin, dressed in th' bes' clothes Edwardsville ever see; an' a lump under his coat-tail I s'picioned. He uz smilin' an' asked all the boys to take some-thin', 'cause he uz jus' back from a money-country.

" 'Don't go to Red's,' says one. 'That big-spurred Sheriff's there, Charlie, an' there'll be trouble.'

“ ‘I’m not dodgin’ anybody,’ said Charlie. ‘Ef any dodgin’s to be done in these parts, m’ fre’n, th’ thief-catcher, ’ll do it.’ An’ then they all went in.

“Shiny uz there, leanin’ over th’ counter, more’n half drunk an’ lookin’ vishus. He seen a nice dressed man come in an’ he know’d right away how th’ cat jumped. They ranged up to th’ bar, none of ’em feelin’ very thirsty, but all lookin’ mighty interested. Shiny straightened up an’ says:

“ ‘You’re Charles Hightower, wanted at Freeport, Georgy, fur murder an’ theft. Ho’l up yo’ han’s.’

“He uz an awful fool. He made his talk, one han’ on th’ counter an’ never draw’d. But w’en he says, ‘hol’ up yo’ han’s,’ he reached back under his coat an’—Shiny never drunk whiskey no mo’. A drift o’ smoke went acrost my eyes, one o’ the glasses on th’ counter dropped to th’ flo’, an’ Shiny, one han’ on th’ m’hog’ny an’ th’ other fumblin’ in th’ air, sunk on his knees, his head hangin’ on his breast.

“ ‘I’ve been a little wild, gentlemen,’

Charlie said, 'but I never murdered anybody, nor stole anybody's beast. Stan' back between me an' th' do', there.'

"We stepped aside an' he crost his hoss an' went clatterin' out o' town. You an' me knows where he went to an' so does the rangers. I don't know Shiny's right name—Charlie 'd tell us, I s'pose; but I ain't no ways cur'ous 'bout other folks' bus'ness. It's my b'lief Shiny wern't no off'cer an' meant to git th' drop on Charlie an' kill him fur some ol' money grudge; but, Lord, he uz drunker'n he looked."

"Yonder's the ranch," said the other, "an' there's ol' Dan on th' gallery with his everlastin' rifle, an' Hightower an' th' gal under th' trees, an' th' ol' woman rustlin' aroun' fur supper. That hits me."

Built on a gentle rise that led up from the slow-moving creek, the ranch faced due east. It was a single-storied white building of sun-dried mud and covered outside with a thick coating of lime. There were four large rooms leading from one to the other by apertures cut in the walls and

closed by hides in lieu of doors. The floor was the original pale soil on which the house was built, and very hard and uneven it was. There were thick clumsy windows, two in front, closed by solid wooden shutters and barred like a jail's. The door was of heaviest hickory, possibly three inches thick, a slab hewed from a giant tree, and when closed was locked, bolted and barred heavily at top, across the middle and at bottom. The place was ugly, of great apparent strength, but with a rude picturesqueness of its own. The roof was of a broad-leaved water weed, laid on in layers and bound, many inches in thickness, perfectly impervious to the seldom rain and as combustible as tinder. It had been of a light tow color, but was now blackened by years of exposure. To the right, left and rear rolled the brown prairie, dotted by frequent thickets of mesquite, chaparral and cactus. The timid deer came from this undergrowth at night and drank of the water within pistol shot. It was thirty-five miles to the nearest post-office, and Dan Hal-

cott, a long, grizzled, tired, quiet man, said he felt crowded but was too old to move. He had "left Mizzoory nigh thirty year ago," and had seen the country fill up "till there wasn't room to turn 'round and spit without hurtin' somebody's feelin's." He owned the headright of 160 acres on which his house was built, and had right of range over countless miles which belonged to nobody, or to the state—practically the same thing. He had fed on flour bread, beef and black coffee twenty-one times a week for twenty-five years and asked nothing better. His amusements were an occasional prolonged drunk in Edwardsville, sixty miles away. He could make shift to write his name; according to his talk believed strenuously in God as a condemning power, and could ride, shoot and rope steers with the wildest Mexican that ever swam the Rio Grande, with a buzzing swarm of countrymen's bullets about him and a delegation of Americans waiting to lynch him on this side.

His wife—like himself, like the earth,

like the grass, like the trees—was brown. She was an angular woman, with thin hair carried back loosely to a knot, large ankles and a shambling timorous gait. There were lines of patient suffering about her mouth and her eyes were dull and filmed with toil of many days. She moved briskly about the room, stopping now and then to take from her mouth a chewed twig and dip it in a pot of snuff placed on a convenient shelf. The fire was hot, the room close, and as she hacked at the piece of iron dried beef she groaned and found small satisfaction in snatches of out-of-date hymns sung in a nasal undertone.

"Dad," came a mellow voice from the front, "two men comin'. Can't make out who they air. But they're ridin' mighty keerless."

Halcott reached for his Winchester and stepped out on the ground which, covered by a thatched shed, did duty for a portico.

"Oh, I know them fellers," he said, after a moment's pause. "Wonder what they're doin' up here. They lives down about Ed-

wardsville. I've got occasion to know that Lem Canty awful well. Kin hol' more whiskey as a pork barrel. Light an' come in," he sung out, genially. "Jus' take off th' saddles an' come along in. Supper's 'bout ready, an' so're we."

As the two men advanced from the fence, each bearing his saddle on his arm, a tall young man with quiet blue eyes and a profusion of black curly hair, met them half way. He was broad-shouldered and clean limbed and moved with the easy grace of youth and unconscious strength.

"Glad to see you, boys," he said, holding out his hand with a frank smile. "What's brought you two here? Thought you were putting in your best work destroying Red's sanitary stores. And how's the old woman, Pete, and the little baby I gave the watch-charm to? Have either of you had the good luck to know Miss Halcott? This is she."

"I know the gal," said Pete simply, as he shook her hand, while Canty dropped

his saddle and rubbed his feet uneasily together.

"Howd'ye," she said softly. "Why don't you shake hands, too?"

"Thankye, Miss," said Lem, "I'm glad to do it."

She was an example of the latter-day physical evolution of the West. Born of a tired and common mother, with no blood of especial value in her, and no desire for any; reared on the windy prairie, where every breath swept undefiled for hundreds of miles over the waving grass; cradled in apparent poverty, but real wealth; fed with coarse food; inured to rough exercise; her growing muscles braced by her open life, she had bloomed into a splendid perfection of womanhood, graceful, brave and strong. She was a bold and tireless rider, a straight shot and learned huntswoman. She would do you a long day's work with unflagging gayety, and dance to a stand-still any five men within a hundred miles. Her eyes were gray, wonderfully deep and jet-black in half-lights, her skin

tanned but clear, chin firm, teeth even, strong and white, and her hair had in it a slight tinge of red. When she spoke to her parents she used their language, a queer mixture of backwoods elisions and Mexican patois; when she whispered to Hightower her talk was better English than you speak and I write. She had, by the lights of her father, the hide-bound, too much learning for a cowman's daughter, having at the earnest solicitation of the circuit-rider—who came twice a year, and when he did, got away as soon as possible—been sent for four sessions to the Edwardsville public school, thence to a neighboring high school for two years, and thence to one "summer normal," an occasional institution intended for the development of teachers, which she had attended with the avowed purpose of earning her own living, an intention speedily abandoned. And thence home, with so much "education" that her mother regarded her with wonder not un-mixed with fear. She had a voice like a bell, played the twelve-stringed Mexican

guitar with taste and sang songs of love and foray until the young attorney's heart went out to her.

The rawhide-bottomed chairs slightly marked the dirt-floor as they were drawn round the plain pine table. Old Halcott, inserting an iron fork into a dish of fried beef, lifted the greasy morsel, deposited it on a tin plate and shoved it along to any one who desired it. The girl refused; the men were helped liberally.

"Seems to me," said the host, "that times gits harder every year. Seems that grass is skeercer and drier, the sun hotter and the steers more cussedder by ten times than they was five years ago. W'y, I've saw the time when a man could ride from here to forty-mile the other side of Edwardsville and never see a human. An' now they tell me a Yankee has moved in on Lemon creek, not more'n ten mile from this here ranch, an' he's got a bunch o' scabby sheep an' proposes to stay there. All I say," he continued, making a vicious cut at a hunk of heavy bread, "is that them fellers don't live

long in this country. They dies sudden, an' away from camp. What, Charlie, was you an' Lem confabbin' about, ef I ain't interferin'?"

"Well," said Hightower, tilting his chair and looking straight at the girl, "you know all about the row at Edwardsville. I am informed by my friends here that the rangers are after me. In other words, they may be looked for along here by to-morrow evening at latest. I don't intend to stir. I like your ranch, Mr. Halcott; I like the people, and I like to please myself. Here we are, and here we stay."

"What air you goin' to do, then?" inquired the ranchman.

"Why," responded the young lawyer, "I shot the man to save my own life. I knew him years ago in Georgia, and I know, too, that he hadn't been back there in three years. Quite the contrary. He has been within one hundred miles of Edwardsville all of the time. He is, or rather was, a member of Dick Harriott's gang, and I guess you know what they are. He had heard

that I intended to run for District Attorney, and his game was to arrest me under a pseudo warrant, take me out of town and—meet some of his companions. He owed me a grudge back in the old states. He was a bad character there, but worse here. So the matter stands. I have nothing to flee from. If necessary, I will go back with the rangers. I left Edwardsville because I did not know at what time some of Harriott's men might ride in, and I think too much of myself not to want a fair show."

He paused and meditatively rolled a cigarette.

"How do you know, Mr. Hightower," whispered the girl, paling slightly, "that Harriott's men won't follow you here?"

"I don't think they have me located; but if they have, there will be a warm time. Unless," he added hurriedly, "the officers reach us first. Then should Mr. Harriott drop in, we'll make things lively for him. The troops have been looking for his camp, and Robinson—the rangers' captain, Miss Anne—would be glad to meet him. I am more

obliged than I can say to you, Canty, and you, Hord, for the long ride you have taken, but it wasn't necessary."

"How many men, Lem Canty," growled Halcott, "do you calk'late that Harriott has got now? They used to be a consid'bul lot of 'em five years ago, an' many's the cow they've skinned fur me; but some's been killed, an' some hung, an' some run out o' the country."

"I'll answer," said Hightower. "Harriott is a man who believes in his business, and always attends to it. A good many of his men have disappeared at one time and another, but he has recruited. He has now, I should say, in good murdering and thieving trim, some eighteen or twenty. He'll bring most of them along, should he come. He's watching the rangers, knows they are after me, and will probably try to beat them here. So taking the chances by and large, Mr. Halcott, I think you can count on a scrimmage in the next two days."

The speaker pushed back his chair and strode out of the door, whither the party

followed him. The Texan atmosphere was no bar to transmission of the million lights that flickered down from a star-strewn sky. There was no moon and the heavens, azure in the noon-time, were a deep and shining black. The breeze pattered fitfully in the leaves of the tall and somber cottonwoods. There were a thousand insect voices in the air, and the little stream sang softly. Over all was a sense of indescribable freshness, a vastness, a freedom from constriction, a solitude that had in it a touch of languor too. The ranchman, with a long-drawn sigh, sank into one of his torturing chairs, and, producing a wooden pipe, filled it with tobacco, which he cut from a plug and rolled between his horny palms; then calling tiredly for a coal, placed it on the damp mixture and sucked arduously. Canty and Hord, seated upon their saddles, shuck-encased cigarettes between their brown fingers, talked sleepily of the day's ride and the chances of the morrow. Hightower and the girl stood on the bank of the creek shrouded in shadow.

"My dear," said Anne, her firm hand resting on her lover's shoulder, "Harriott is a very bad man, isn't he? Don't you feel uneasy over his coming?"

"Can't say that I do," he replied, slowly. "I snatch the day when I am with you, sweetheart, and am not troubled by thoughts of the 'Terror of the Rio Bravo,' as I believe he styled himself in some dodgers he once had struck at the Edwardsville printing office, and has since pasted on every road in the county. Sufficient for the day is the evil thereof."

"I'm thinking that," she answered. "You're not very good, you know, and you're enough for me."

"Not utterly depraved, though?"

"I don't think so. Do you know how long it has been since I first met you? At the dance in the Edwardsville court-house, when the fiddler got drunk and the tallow candles dripped on my hair and my new dress. More than a year now. And you are not District Attorney yet. I branded

twelve hundred calves this spring. You will never catch up."

"Beef-owning maiden," he replied, as he stretched along the grass, his feet within six inches of the water, "I have more money than I know what to do with; but not more than your respected father considers necessary for his daughter's mate. With him removed, we would marry to-morrow and I would own the ranch."

"Would we? I think too much of him to spare him, and you will never own the ranch while I live. You'll need him, too, if Harriott comes with his trumpets and his drums. I saw him once. What a handsome man he is!"

"Very," said Hightower, puffing vigorously at his cigarette, "as sweet a character I should say as ever stole a neighbor's horse and murdered him after for claiming his own. But it's ill talking of Dick Harriott. I'll get your guitar and you'll sing me the song I made you."

He returned in an instant, and, again prone on the grass, was ready to listen.

The girl sat with her profile against the sky, and he could mark the rich sweep of her hair and the rise and fall of her white throat and bosom.

"It isn't much of a song," ventured Anne.
"It's the singing puts life into it."

Stars throb within the tender sky,
The mantle of the night
Is flung between my love and me
And hides her from my sight.
Beneath her window lattice I
Stand waiting prayerfully.
Ah, dear! smile on my loneliness,
Come down to me!

Fair, pallid stars, whose roving beams
Fill all the somber night
With glintings of soft mystery
And fairy shades and light,
Your gleaming is in rivalry
Of eyes of gramarye,
But fainter far, of weaker spell!
Come down to me!

With your white arms about my throat
And your dear cheek on mine,
With whispers of a tender note
And beakers of Love's wine,

What care I though my life be chained,
My soul no longer free?
Embodiment of Passion's power,
Come down to me!

Sweetheart, your gray eyes are my stars!
Your anger is my night!
Give to me something of thy love,
My life and light!

The wind of the night was odorous. Hightower had stolen his hand on hers, and her slight, warm fingers lay in his without a quiver. Their paths were set before them. He saw the way lying plain in the starlight. They were in a land of infinite possibilities, its future strength shadowed in the richness of its fields and its splendid loneliness. They would be happy. Years from now, years filled to the brim with content, each following fast in the footsteps of the other, they would sink into the kindly bosom of the land which had nourished them, leaving the void which follows the departure of the loved. Across the eastern sky, with a strident hiss and humming that could be felt more than heard, a meteor

rushed, leaving a trail of incandescence and paling the stars it passed over.

"It looks like blood," Anne said, with a shudder. "The Dipper is high in the sky, and the locust voices are hushed. Stand back while I look at you. What a tall, pretty fellow you are! Good-night!"

CHAPTER II.

ROBINSON OF THE RANGERS.

At noon, when the summer sun was high; when Halcott had returned to the ranch on his thirteen-hand pony, with not a drop of moisture on his leathery skin, tossed the saddle under the trees and turned loose the horse, to be seen again, probably, in six months, inveighing bitterly the while against the heat and scarcity of water; when Anne and Hightower had talked their plans over for the tenth time, and started cheerfully on the eleventh; when Hord and Canty had rolled innumerable cigarettes, told innumerable tales of round-ups and Indian forays and enjoyed to the full the

sweets of doing nothing; when tired Mrs. Halcott had made ready to announce that dinner was "done" and glanced wistfully at the idle men under the trees, on the far divide which cut the horizon to the east of the ranch, a puff of dust was seen, and in an instant the figures of men on horses rose against the sky and melted into the descending slope.

"Rangers or rustlers?" came from Hightower, working a stockman's small field-glass. "Rangers say I. They ride straight, and there is one man a good bit in front."

"Robinson!" said old man Halcott. "He's allers in front on that big bay o' his'n, an' the boys is bouncin' up-en-down in the saddles an' ridin' after him. He's a good off'cer, Robinson is; but young and too fond of trouble. But, Lord, I ain't got nothin' agin him. 'Tain't longer ago than six month that he an' his fellers crost right into Mexico an' got back a hundred head o' steers th' greasers tuk from me. This ranch is his long's he wants it, an' everything on it 'cept my saddle an' my wife."

"How 'bout me, Dad?" inquired Anne, who stood near watching from under arched hands the growing cloud of dust.

"Oh, you," said the aged cow-puncher, with a hoarse laugh, "you, I take it, are bespoken; though you ain't said nothin' to me an' your mammy 'bout it," and he glanced calmly and inquiringly at Hightower.

"Right you are," said the latter, rising and stretching lazily. "Miss Anne and I have agreed to practice law together when I get my office. And I'll get it certain this fall." He pronounced "office" with the lingering intonation of the southern lawyer, who is always a politician.

"They'll be here in a half-hour," said Cauty, lounging up the speakers. "It's a long ways off, but they're jus' eatin' up th' groun'. I sh'd say they seen or know somethin'. When them fellers dropped over the hill like they did, I know'd they uz comin' han's down."

"When you see th' boys," chimed in Hord, "ridin' close in a bunch like that, with Robinson twenty feet in th' lead, some-

body's got to hustle or tackle a hard time. I been out with 'em merse'f. Covered eighty-five mile between Piedras Pintas an' th' Rio Grande in fourteen hours, jus' a year ago this fall. An' we never got th' man we uz ridin' fur, neither."

"Was a lively traveler, was he?" asked Anne, with some interest.

"He had one hour's start, an' we follered him all night. When we swung down the bank o' th' river th' sun uz risin' an' the tracks on th' other side uz wet where he rid out o' th' water. But we never caught him. You git a thief in Mexico an' you've got him where he lives. Look mighty keerful, or he'll git you. Ask Robinson."

The approaching party could now be plainly seen. They were coming at a swinging gait, rising and falling in the gallop with the careless ease of the southwestern rough rider. The horses were flecked with foam, and as they drew near, the men's faces were set and pale with long exertion. They clattered up the slope and drew rein simultaneously in front of the house.

"Sixty miles this morning," said their leader, as he sprang from his shivering steed and doffed his wide hat to Anne Halcott. "Is Charles Hightower here?"

"I am, Captain," said the wanted, who had disappeared and now made his entrance. "What can I do for you?"

"I want you for shooting Ruggles in Edwardsville," as he shook his prisoner's hand. "You never did a better thing, but law is law, and I'm its humble instrument. It seems to me," he added with a smile, "that I scent dinner."

"So you do," quavered Mrs. Halcott from the interior, "jus' come right in, Cap'n, you an' your boys. I ain't forgot one of em's ridin' twenty mile once to bring me news my ol' man uz safe that row at Bedler's camp. Lordy, Anne, fly 'roun' an' git th' Cap'n a cheer."

The man deserves description. In this day of pointed-shoe civilization, his type is only in the very far west. Perhaps he was common in the hardy times of fifty years ago. Surely there must have been an an-

cestry of wonderful strength and resoluteness and daring that gave Thomas Robinson his powerful frame and steadfast, keen and patient eyes. Five feet ten inches he stood, long-armed and small-footed, not an ounce of superfluous flesh on him, small dark eyes, but wide apart; high cheekbones and thin close lips, chin square and skin burned to Indian blackness by the fierceness of many suns. A handsome face, too, but somewhat hard. Men said that ten years ago he had been the gayest, most reckless of the many adventurers who sifted the life of the west in a sieve which was to hold nuggets of gold. Whence he came nobody knew, and not many cared to inquire. He was not a man to question idly. But he was honest, all men agreed on that, and a fearless, hard-working, singularly efficient officer. He knew the western criminal well, his daring, his cunning and his weakness. From Paso del Norte to the waters of the Gulf he was known and feared. Five years of ranger life had given the hard look to his face. Scenes of murder and

rapine and orgy and blood-encarnadined awakening; of long pursuit and swift vengeance; of love and crime; of light and shadow manifold, his calm eyes had looked upon. They said of him that once, in the gray of the early morning when the hunted desperado turned at bay in the chaparral and the blue smoke of the Winchester drifted lightly, he had taken the dead man's little child on the saddle before him and ridden many miles in a blistering sun to find it shelter. He was unmarried, and his whole life was given to taming the fierce element which none knew as he, and which he had come—as is the manner of men long inured to pursuit of criminals—to half-way respect and admire. There were braves among them, and he loved courage in any form; there were handsome women among them, as he had once found to his cost.

Halcott approached and held out his seamed and knotted hand. "Cap'n," he said simply, "th' ranch is yours. I ain't forgot them steers. Mar has got some chickens cooked—an'—an' less set down."

The men trooped in bashfully and scraped their chairs over the hard ground. Anne smiled cheerfully at the Captain, and filled Hightower's plate in a motherly way. Mrs. Halcott had discarded her snuff-twig and bustled about eager to serve her guests. The ranchman had his mouth full, and was contented in the exercise of feeding, which broke the monotony of his life thrice in a day.

"Do you know," asked Hightower, glancing carelessly at Robinson, "anything of a party named Harriott?"

"Just going to mention the matter," was replied. "Think we will catch him to-night."

"As how?"

"He's after you. Didn't you know it? I did when I left Edwardsville."

Hightower stared at the officer a moment, then absently crumbled a bit of bread between his fingers. His face was grave, but there was no fear on it.

"How did you know?" he inquired.

"Last night," said Robinson, speaking

very clearly and rapidly, "I heard that Harriott's gang was after you. Never mind how I got the information; it was perfectly reliable. The reason given me was Harriott's fear of your election in the coming contest for the District Attorneyship. I was told also that Harriott knew your present stopping place—pleasantly situated you are!—and sh—he, my informant, was certain that the rustlers would make for you without delay. And, as I can judge from the late removal of Ruggles, how valuable your aid as an officer will be, I thought I would ride out and take you in charge. I am happy to state that Mr. Harriott has no idea of my whereabouts, and believes you at present practically unbefriended. Got a light?"

"Thousand times obliged, old man," laughed Hightower. "Though contrary to custom, I hope you'll allow your prisoner to carry his weapons."

"Why, certainly!" replied the Captain. "I believe that Dick will bring his entire band, and we'll certainly need everybody

disposed to help. His horses are in good fix, and he will ride hard. He always does, blank him! My apologies to the ladies for strong language, but when I get on the subject of Harriott I am apt to grow profuse."

"I know'd that, Dick," broke in Halcott, "when he uz a brown little boy at his mammy's elbow all day long. I seen him more'n a hunderd times down at ol' Harriott's place afore the ol' man uz killed by th' vigilantys. He uz a merry little chap an' smoked an' chewed same as a man. He tuk to stealin' w'en he uz 18-year ol', an' he's been at it ever sence. Mexican Pedro, that worked for me two year ago, uz a quiet peace'bul chap, an' a good han'. Dick shot him at a fandango down to Thompson's fur less'n nothin' 't all. Pedro uz dancin' with Nita Valdez, what runned into Mexico with a man name Grigsby, an' Dick walked up to him an' says, 'You're too free, greaser,' an' shot him dead. Th' gal reached fur Pedro's knife, an' Dick jumped on his horse

an' loped away. Pedro uz a mighty good han'."

"You could fill the day counting over Harriott's doings," said Robinson, rising and stepping out of the room. "He has given me more trouble than any ten men on the frontier. He has hiding places in Texas, most of which I know, and haunts in Mexico, most of which I do not know. He has outridden me often and outfought me once. But to-night," and the speaker's small black eyes glittered, "we will play for even.

"It is no question," he added, turning to Hightower, "of capture. It is a question of who is the best man." His cigarette, bitten through, fell to the ground and he turned away.

"Well," said Halcott, picking up a raw-hide lariat, "Harriott can't get here till after dark. Don't b'leve he's comin', anyhow. Gentlemen, will you ride with me?"

Canty and Hord rose unwillingly, and the Captain and his men stretched themselves for rest.

It was evening. The red-globed sun poised jauntily on his rim on the far line of western ridge, and stared at the somber waste of solitude. The trees made ten times their length on the brown grass, and one ambitious cottonwood, taller than its fellows, reached the rocky side of a hill three hundred yards away and wavered up and down, slowly climbing to the top. The leaves clicked gently together and the grass stood straight and stiff and dark in the falling shades. In the eastern sky two greenish stars hung winking, and away in the north a heavy black line of cloud rose grimly. There was a hush on everything. The ranch animals were still, and Halcott and his guests sat under the arbor placidly smoking.

Anne's hand had stolen into her lover's and she nestled at his feet, smiling nervously and whispering from time to time. He was very grave. The impending struggle sobered him. As he gazed into the coming darkness, the girl's soft fingers around his own and her cheek brushing his

knee, he saw himself on the wide prairie in the fangs of that human wolf. He was bound on a horse, led by a man in front, who bobbed carelessly in his saddle, and shut in on either side and behind by shadowy forms with murder in their shining eyes. He heard the leader's coarse laugh as the company passed swiftly over the crumbling soil, and saw the halt, the dismount, the circled forms, the all enveloping blackness. God! how lonely it was! The giant outlaw sprang from his saddle.

"Kill him!" he said shortly.

There was a falling back of the figures around him, a long sigh of the wind in the mesquite—

Hark! What was that? The long howl of the prairie wolf rose on the air and hung tremulant. The sound swelled higher and more full and the waves of it beat the ear. It was answered by shrill barks that seemed to snap from a thousand throats. The coyotes were abroad. Then came a shrill scream as of one in mortal pain, the voice bursting with agony. Then again the sharp

cluck-cluck of some bird disturbed by the passage overhead of the slow-flapping owl.

"Fine songsters those coyotes, Miss Anne," said Robinson. "I owe many a night's amusement to them. You always see them dodging in and out the circle of light of the camp fire."

"Come with me," whispered the girl, rising and touching Hightower's hair. "Just a little while."

He followed her into the darkness.

"I am afraid," she said, "I don't know why. Possibly it is because I love you so. I have lived on the ranch in wild times, you know, when every moonlit night brought raiding Indians or Mexicans. I have drawn close to my mother when we heard them, but I have never felt afraid. But now I am changed. I want you to do something to please me. I fear the man riding toward us. Come with me and get my horse and yours, saddle them and place them near the house. That clump of mesquite on the knoll will do. Who knows what may happen, and I want you at least to go safe."

"Do you know," said Hightower, standing pale and looking at her, "that you are asking me to do a dishonorable thing, to take a base advantage of men who have come here to protect me?"

"Oh, dear!" sighed Anne. "Then, Charlie, will you get my horse—only mine. I don't want to die."

"This is not like my girl," said Hightower, "but you have a right to your brute if you want him. Come along."

In silence they stepped over the prairie, stumbling now and then, Anne's dress catching in the small cactus that dotted the ground. The horse was found sleeping, and when his mistress' hand was placed on his neck and her voice spoke to him, staggered to his feet and rubbed his head against her arm. He was a gray of unusual size for a ranch horse, with limbs splendidly muscled and the untiring gallop of the west. His speed when pushed was great, and having been near his owner all of his short life, and having received only benefits from her, loved her with a gallant and knightly heart.

He shook himself and followed, her hand resting lightly on his forelock. Her stout saddle was taken from the back eave of the roof and girthed on him.

"He might have been a better color," said Hightower, as they left him standing tied to the mesquite, his coat showing amidst the dark twigs.

"No matter," said Anne. "Bob will stay until he is wanted. He is always true to me; and last year I rode him a mile against John Grayson's horse at Edwardsville and made John ashamed."

"That you did!" her lover responded approvingly. "I saw you do it."

They found the people at the house waiting their advent to retire. The men were gathered under the shed, the Captain and Halcott with them. The lady of the house had gone inside, much frightened, and mumbling snuff voraciously.

"I have been waiting for you, Hightower," said Robinson, "and"—with a smile—"I didn't like to hurry you. It is growing late, however, and I think we had best

get inside. All of the horses have been saddled and picketed two hundred yards to the left of the house, yours among them. I don't think that we will have trouble in finishing the gang after Harriott is downed, but pursuit will be necessary. They won't find the horses. I know you all to be good men. I have every confidence in those I found here, and I have brought my best men with me. Please remember, gentlemen, that as long as Harriott lives, it is a fight. Let's adjourn."

CHAPTER III.

A RIDE FOR A LIFE.

It was twelve in the night, and Anne Halcott sat ready dressed in her room. She had donned a heavy, strong gown of dark color, a soft hat, and on one heel was a small shining spur. Her riding gloves lay in her lap, and her hands were tightly clasped, the fingers wound together. She

was in an agony of waiting. She had been gazing at a small slit of dark sky through a crevice in the roof. Only two or three stars were visible, and outside it was deadly still. The heavy breathing of the men in the next room sounded monotonously on her ear. There was no turning nor stirring among them. They slept the sleep of those who live in an atmosphere of danger, lightly but soundly. A choking snuffle from the old woman alone gave token of an uneasy consciousness of impending trouble. The starry minutes went slowly by. There was a breath now winding about the old building, and toying with the grasses on the roof. It passed and all was still again.

A tremulous sound stole on the girl's ear. She bent eagerly forward. Again it came. Again. She was sure of it now! Louder and steadier and stronger—the roll of hoofs on the prairie. She drew a quick gasping breath and moved lightly into the other room. It was characteristic of her that, in the dark among the sleepers, she went straight to the form of the ranger leader.

"Captain!" she whispered softly and steadily, "Captain! they have come!"

Robinson was on his knees in an instant, every sense at his command. He stooped his ear to the floor and a smile stole over his face in the dark.

"Right you are, Miss Anne," he said, "and a girl in a thousand. Get up, men, and feel for the tools."

The rangers,—Hightower, Hord, Canty and Halcott, twelve in all,—were awake and a moment later on their feet. Each man had his weapons beside him, and rose with them in his hands.

"Not a word from any one," said Robinson. "Let Harriott do the talking."

The hoof-beats swelled into separate distinctness, then with a crash the horses leaped the creek and the riders surged to the ranch.

"Inside there!" said a strong rasping voice. "Git up, Dan Halcott, an' show a light."

There was no answer from the house.

Its inmates might have been absent or dead for all the sound it gave.

"Git up, I tell you!" rapped the man in an irritated tone. "I know that young dog is there. It's him I want; nobody's goin' to hurt you. Git up, I say, an' open th' door, or we'll break it down. Show a light!"

Robinson, who had been quietly inspecting the party through one of the rifle-slits in the wall, turned and whispered: "Sixteen!"

He stepped back and closed the orifice. The man outside, snarling a savage oath, advanced to the door and struck it a heavy blow with the butt of his pistol.

"Git up! you infernal ol' thief!" he yelled. "Git up an' let us in, or we'll feed you to the coyotes!"

For answer there was a flash and sharp report inside, and Harriott sprang back with an exclamation. Hightower had fired through the door.

"Wasting lead, my boy," said Robinson.

"Get to the holes, men, and pick out Harriott if you can."

The rangers stepped to their posts and the rifles cracked. One of Harriott's men was shot from his horse, and another fell as the first struck the ground.

"Back to the trees!" roared the outlaw. "It's Robinson's men!"

His men rushed back into the shelter of the cottonwoods and returned the fire. There was a ceaseless flash and counter-flash. The bullets struck the adobe walls with vicious pats and the bark flew from the edges of the trees. The moon climbed over the eastern ledge of hills and shone with a sickly gleam. Each party, warmed to the fighting pitch, hailed the advent of more light. The smoke of the powder drifting back into the room had grown suffocating. It swirled along the walls and hung heavily near the floor. Anne, in her chamber, through her own loop-hole, was pluckily watching the fight. Her mother lay in a moaning heap on the floor. Old Halcott, gaunt and unmoved, stuck to his post or

turned to spit energetically and rummage for more cartridges. Hightower, his face flushed and blue eyes dancing, was shooting at every knot and excrescence which he fancied sheltered his enemy. Robinson had selected another point as the abiding place of the outlaw, and was taking few but careful shots at the edge of a coat-sleeve or rim of a sombrero. His face was very set and pale and his eyes half-closed and watchful.

"The devils shoot well," he muttered, as a bullet entered within an inch of the muzzle of his Winchester and struck the opposite wall.

One more of the rustlers had leaned back from his shelter and fallen with a splash into the creek. One of the rangers was down, shot through the face and mute as an Indian. The fight had lasted possibly half an hour in silence on each side, when there came a slackening from the trees, only an occasional report warning the inmates of the house to be careful.

"D—n it!" groaned Robinson, "they're going to give in and run."

Then they heard the rapid gallop of a horse behind the house. It drew nearer and one of Harriott's men, with a hoarse shout, dashed past, sparks and shreds of burning grass clinging to him. An instant later he fell from his horse, shot through.

"I might have known it!" said the Captain ecstatically. "What a fighter he is! They have fired the roof."

In fact, they could hear the dry crackling of the grass covering. A shrill shout told that the outlaws saw the success of the maneuver which had cost them a life. Three or four straggling sparks dropped down inside the wall.

"Out the back way!" said Robinson, quickly. "Divide, men, and take to the brush on each side. Make for the creek and come at them through the trees."

The back door was unbarred and the men sprang out. Halcott had his old wife in his arms.

"I am going to the horse, Charlie," said

Anne, throwing one arm around his neck. "Good-bye!" and she bounded like a deer across the open prairie. Thirty yards from the house the bandits saw her and fired on her. Hightower, slowly writhing through the grass, heard the shots and ground his teeth. Only Robinson's strong arm kept him from springing upright.

"Quiet!" he whispered. "She's not hit!" and the lithe figure leaped into the undergrowth.

The rangers had gained the thicket. They rose and rushed for the creek. The two parties reached it at nearly the same time. The men to the left, led by a long-headed corporal, had suffered no damage. Robinson's sombrero had been jerked from his head by the stroke of a bullet, and blood was running from Hightower's shoulder. Halcott, dragging his wife slowly along, had left her when the undergrowth was gained and straightened unhurt. The troopers with them were unscathed and unmoved. It was to them merely an unusually lively scrimmage. Robinson's face had

changed. The loss of his hat irritated him. His eyes snapped and his lips were tight drawn.

"By God!" he growled, as he slipped from one tree to another, "I'll kill him if I have to follow him to the City of Mexico."

Hightower was smiling but pale, and walked with difficulty. He was losing strength. Harriott's force were still. They knew they had been outwitted in some manner, and were waiting developments. They came with the increasing roar of the burning house. Red lines of light darted among the silvery trunks. The leaves turned to waving bits of fire and the twigs glowed crimson in the glare. The bandit, his keen eyes glancing to and fro, saw the shadows of his advancing foes cast upon the waters of the creek. He gave his attention to Robinson, knowing nothing of the body of men stealthily moving on his rear. A sharp crack and a bit of bark flying into the air gave the Captain intimation that his attack would be sternly met. It was from a trunk behind which one of his men had crouched.

The fellow grinned expressively, and brushed the splinters from his hair.

"Got it in for you, Roberts!" remarked his leader. "Close in quickly, men, and shoot at every piece of cloth you see."

The parties were not fifty yards apart. It was as light as day. The rifles cracked viciously. Robinson's force pressed forward steadily, the outlaws holding their ground. The Winchesters began to rattle further down the stream. Harriott swore and glanced savagely round. He was trapped, hemmed in. No shelter on the bare prairie, now bathed in the light of the burning ranch. Only to die as the wild beast dies, cordoned, but game to the last. His hat had fallen and his red hair hung tangled on his forehead. He gathered himself together, dropped his gun, drew his pistol, called to his men and sprang forward. At that instant Hightower, shot through the neck, sank forward from his tree. Harriott, forgetting his woodcraft and his cunning, leaped toward him. He had advanced a dozen feet, when he sprang high into the

air—shot through the heart. Robinson's laugh rang in the trees. The rangers in the rear of the hunted desperadoes cheered and closed in relentlessly. The fight degenerated to a butchery. Three of the outlaws fell dead in the creek. Others were cut down on the prairie, fleeing desperately. Others dropped their arms, shrieked for mercy and were shot.

Robinson stooped over his friend. The attorney lay without breath or motion. There was the swift thud of a horse's feet, and Anne dashed among them. Her face was very pale and set, her eyes luminous like stars.

"Captain," she said, "the prairie is on fire. Where is he?"

Robinson looked up and she recognized her lover's face. She threw herself from her horse.

"Is he dead?" laying her cheek on his. "For God's sake, say no."

"I think not," responded Robinson, hurriedly glancing round. "There is some life in him yet."

"Give him to me!" she replied, bounding into the saddle. "Lift him and give him to me!"

"God speed you, Miss Anne!" said Robinson, his face showing pale in the light as the men stooped and delivered their burden. "You must ride for it. We shall do well enough in the creek, but a badly wounded man could not live in the water. Ride straight for Edwardsville. You will get there, I know. I have heard our own horses break the lariats and go. Tell the people!"

A few turns of the lasso bound the lifeless man to her. His weight was on her lap; his head rested on her shoulder, the blood staining the dark bosom of her dress. The heat had grown intense, and some of the men had already sought the shelter of the stream. The fire roared and wept toward them in waves.

Anne wheeled her horse and shot into the night. A cheer greeted her as she rode away. It was a race for two lives. Looking back she saw the fire span the creek

with a rush. The flame climbed up the dry trunks and limbs of the trees. She heard the steady roar of the freshening prairie wind. It was a vortex of hell, surging and crackling round the living and the dead in the little hollow. She set her face to the dark. Startled birds were wheeling and screaming in the air. She could hear the giant leaps of the red pursuer. The grass was knee-high and burned like powder. The weight of her lover pressed hardly on her. The gallant horse under the double burden rushed forward. Every tendon in him was tense as iron. Who shall know the high resolve, the steady purpose, the bravery, the splendid capability for prolonged effort beating in his heart? Dim in the front rose a mighty range of dusty hills. She was leaving the fire. The molten glare was high in the heavens behind her and she felt its heat, but she was gaining. Once a flying spark had lighted on her hair, burned awhile and gone out. She never knew it.

Looking forward always now. Rising and falling with the mighty strides. Lean-

ing slightly forward, her hands low, her lover's lashed head upon her bosom. Her life was in that freight. Her breath fanned his cheek. She murmured his name unceasingly.

She breasted the range of hills and, pausing for a moment, looked back. Save for a long line of feeble flame across the black earth, all was cheerless darkness. The fire had burned itself out. What was the fate of those left behind—mother, father and friends? She scarcely gave them a thought. She was centered on the dying man in her arms. Once in the long night he stirred uneasily.

"Gentlemen," he muttered, "I have taken no man's beast. Stand back from the door, there!"

Even that slight motion sent a spasm of pain through her cramped form. The stars paled in the sky and the horse moved wearily. All the spring was out of him, but he plodded on. A single time, in her agony of spirit, Anne struck him with the spur, then in mercy forbore. The flush of dawn

streaked the gray east as she descended the divide. Far below her, miles away in the tender light, lay the white spire of Edwardsville's church and the slated dome of its court-house.

The sky was a blinding blue and the sun was pitiless as the snug citizens of the little country town paused on their way to worship that Sunday morn and gazed on a strange sight. Down the long dusty street, on a trembling and shrunken steed, with eyes glassy, hair heavy and damp and face deathly pale, came a woman bearing in her arms a blood-draggled man. The rawhide thongs had worn deep into her flesh. Streaks of blood had dried on her cheeks and neck. The knot of hotel loungers sprang into the street and stopped. Otherwise she would have ridden straight on.

"My God! it's Anne!" cried a woman, starting forward and laying her hand on the girl.

She had not seen any of them. High-tower was not recognized, so covered was his face with the black blood that had ebbed

from him. As the pair were carried into the hostelry—Anne stiffened into sitting posture, Hightower limp as a rag—the horse, giving a mighty groan as the girths were loosened, stumbled awkwardly away.

"That's th' hoss," said one of the men eyeing him pityingly, "the girl rode here last year. Lord, what a hoss he were!"

"He'll come 'round all right," said another. "Don't let him get to water." And, on fire with curiosity, they trooped into the building. No word more for that faithful servant.

Anne gasped a few words as the woman dashed restoratives into her face: "Dick Harriott—Captain Robinson—the ranch burned—father, mother, where are you?"

The hardy residents who had built the town needed no further explanation. There was no church that day. In a half-hour the men had left in troops. The women, flushed in honest zeal and marshaled by the old village doctor, hovered round the patients.

"He'll pull through," said the physician, speaking of Hightower. "It's only a flesh

wound in the neck, and one in the shoulder. He has lost a good deal of blood; but she"—and he raised his hat reverentially—"has suffered more than he."

"Ef I had a gal like that," said an aged woman as she gazed on the livid face and patted the pillows tremulously, "there wouldn't be nothin' on God Almighty's earth good 'nough fur her." And they all nodded approvingly.

Three months later the little church was bright with candles. The central chandelier, imported at great expense from the old states and lighted only on extraordinary occasions, blazed. The court-room, too, had been watered and swept and made ready for the dance. Some of last term's used-up quids still nestled coyly in the corners, but the place on the whole was presentable. Ranged around the only place of worship, tied to trees, stumps, fences, each other, or standing untied, were numerous horses and wagons from surrounding ranches. Their owners were doing honor to the event inside. Robinson was there

with some of his men; two died at the ranch. Halcott was there unmoved, but sad. His old wife's bones were found scorched and blackened by the blast of the prairie fire. Canty was there unperturbed, and Hord, mildly contemplative, in no one's way save his own.

The simple words were said and the lean old minister stooped forward and kissed the bride's clear cheek, as Anne stood rosy and smiling, her hand on the arm of her tall husband.

STATE'S EVIDENCE.

The prisoner at the bar looked at the jury with haggard eyes. His sparse hair rose straight in front and fell jagged and tangled on a dusty coat-collar. There was a nervous twitching in his tobacco-stained lips, and shiftiness in the way he moved his long neck and turned hurriedly to confer with his counsel. He was the focus of five hundred pairs of eyes under whose scrutiny he shrank. His face said that he had been hard and reckless; a man of deeds against the law and its officers; of lax regard for the rights of others; of the intense selfishness so prominent a part in the make-up of the criminal. He was a common man, too, of the lower order of society—which, by the way, he called when he mentioned it at all, “sassiety,” and held in contempt.

One hand grasped the scattering beard. His under lip was swollen and scarred by

the discolored teeth pressed against it at various times of the trial. Over by the rusty stove in the corner a group of young attorneys sat, hair thrown back to expose foreheads, feet placed comfortably on vacant chairs, shirt-collars and cravats awry, eyes tired and sleepy, laughing and jesting in a whisper.

The judge, old and hard with many winters, many weary miles of arid circuits, many nights out with the boys, closed his eyes and, by force of long practice, heard every word while his thoughts were elsewhere. The blue-flies hummed against the window-panes, and the jury, one and all, seemed suicidal. A pale, tired woman, with old sun-bonnet set crookedly upon her aching head and a snuff-stick in her mouth, held a suckling baby and gazed drearily at the prisoner. There were other women, too, presumably relatives—all weary, all interested and all dipping snuff.

A hum arose from the spectators who watched with flagging zeal the legal tragedy before them. The blare of a brass band

floated into the room with the cries of hawkers on the streets—for it was court-week and the Rio Grande town was full of people. Outside the sun rioted on the white sand and unpaved walks and weather-beaten fronts of the houses. There was strength and hope and freedom in the swooping shafts of heat and in the soft breeze that came from over the leagues of prairie. Knots of people stood in the darkened stores or on the corners eagerly discussing the progress of the case and the chances of the man who was on trial for his life. For it was the State of Texas vs. Gabriel Wilkinson, indictment for murder in the first degree.

“Tell yer,” said one man, as the shavings flew from his virulent pocket-knife, “he had orter swing. They’re th’ toughest crowd in th’ county—an’ that’s sayin’ lots. Yer don’ recklect, mebbe, what ol’ Gabe’s in th’ hole fur, but I do. It’s seven year ago that th’ killin’ uz done; but, Lord, it didn’t make much stir them times.

“He were a Jew peddler who come along

with a big pack o' notions an' sol' goods right here in this town—lots! One mornin' he lef' for th' Tordillos settlemint to rake the folks down there. He uz known to stop at ol' Gabe's house fur th' night an' flashed a big roll. He uz known to leave nex' mornin' with ol' Gabe fur guide! Jesus! An' he warn't seen no mo'. That is, he warn't seen no mo' sellin' goods. They foun' him in the woods 'bout a week after. All his money and mos' of his goods uz gone. An' he never knowed what hit him."

The speaker expectorated freely and resumed: "But it cr'ated no big stir them times. Lord, no! Folks know'd in reason that ol' Gabe done it. He uz terribul flush fur awhile, an' his young wife—she uz a han'some gal w'en he married her—she come to chu'ch in a red silk dress as mos' o' th' town rec'nized. Many a woman here had a-wanted to buy that piece, but the Jew asked too much fur it. An' he sol' it mighty cheap after all. Er-haw-haw!

"Th' come new people here with talk

'bout 'law an' order,' an' 'State development' an' 'night-schools,' an' sich; an' the Sheriff as were Sheriff then warn't 'lected no mo'. Then ol' Gabe went on the quadow—dodge, yer know. He's been on it ever sence. He uz run down like a haverleener in the brush two months ago, an' he made what yer might call a good game fight, but 'twarn't no sorter use. Never is. Some says as 'nother man uz in th' killin', kinder helpin' Gabe, an' th' off'cers is keepin' him low. I dunno. Gabe never needed no help I take it."

The hum in the court-house had ceased. Night came through the dirty windows and the lamps were lit. The spectators leaned over the benches, and from the dark background their faces glared steadily. It seemed to the lonely man, sitting constrained and still, that they were rising to the ceiling to fall on and crush him. The women were paler and the baby's cries were hushed. The officers were alert. When a man opened the door and tiptoed noiselessly in, hat in hand, the sheriff's head turned

and his steady eyes watched the intruder until he melted into the crowd.

The droning, unimportant witness stepped from the stand; the judge straightened and looked eagerly over his pulpit-like enclosure; the young lawyers at the stove, pretty well filled with stimulants by this time, took down their feet and ceased to whisper; two deputies stood up calmly; the lean prosecutor arose, cast one swift triumphant glance at the jury, another at the judge, one more at the nervous little attorney for the defense, a last long searching one at the prisoner, turned to the waiting men and said:

"Bring in Si Brody, alias John Thompson, alias William Parker."

The effect was like a knife-thrust on the man at bar. His dark skin grew a sickly green, his small, pale blue eyes turned inward, his lips drew slowly back, disclosing the huge yellow teeth, and his powerful hands gripped the chair arms till the knotted veins rose in rebellion and the wood creaked under the strain. Huddled in his

chair, he looked an incarnation of murder crouching for the spring. His faded wife rose from her seat, screamed faintly and dropped back. In strange perversity she wore, even then, a stained, discolored scarlet silk gown.

A silence followed, broken only by the rapid beating of the prisoner's foot upon the floor and the quick rustling of papers in his lawyer's trembling fingers. A measured tramp sounded upon the stairs, the door swung open and the two officers appeared, their hands resting on the shoulders of a figure between them.

All eyes were bent upon him, and he knew it. With shuffling tread and hand to his face, he was shoved rather than led into the witness chair. He was the pariah of his class, the detestation of criminals, the frequent instrument of the law, the vicarious avenger—State's Evidence.

There was scorn and loathing of him in every look, from the Judge on the bench to the small boy in the rear, industriously cracking pecans. Only the District At-

torney encouraged him with a smile as the disgusted clerk arose and offered him the book to kiss. He touched it lightly with his dry lips and muttered an affirmative to the rapid formula. He avoided looking at the prisoner, who, with unchanging rigid gaze, glared venomously at him. No leading questions were necessary. He told it glibly, rapidly, as if anxious to have done with it and escape from the inimical atmosphere that surrounded him.

Yes, his right name was Si Brody. He had known the prisoner long. He saw him murder the peddler, "Jew Levy." He shot him in the head while they were walking side by side. The Jew did not speak after the shot. The witness and Wilkinson divided the booty, Wilkinson taking the larger share. He had given some of it to Wilkinson's wife. Wilkinson also had given some to the woman. The red silk was given by Wilkinson. He believed she then had on the dress. It looked like it. They told her they had bought the goods. Wilkinson had planned the murder and

committed it unaided. He (Brody) had simply followed his lead.

"You lie!" yelled the prisoner, springing to his feet, his gaunt frame shaken with passion. "You did it yourself!"

For the first time Brody looked at him.

"I tell th' truth," he said. "Your folks has threatened my life to keep me from tellin'! I b'lieve they'll kill me yet."

Wilkinson sank into his chair. "Y'are right," he muttered.

It was some hours later that the jury, pale, but a unit, brought in their announcement of murder in the first degree. The condemned heard the verdict and sentence unmoved. He seemed to breathe more freely now that the strain was over, and his eyes, no longer feverishly intent on proceedings, roamed restlessly among the faces, seeking his betrayer. Brody had slunk away, after a merciless cross-examination, and now stood half-sheltered behind the Sheriff. That functionary was very grave, and it was noticed that his treatment of the State's witness was gentle.

"It reminds me," said one, "of how he looked the day he hung Seth Jones, the nigger."

Evidently the Sheriff regarded Brody as moribund—a man under sentence, whose life-lease was shorter by weeks than that of his former companion. If a poll of the five hundred people then assembled could have been taken, probably not one would have refused to concur in the opinion that the person of aliases in his desperate grasp at liberty had signed his own death warrant.

He knew it. It was to be read in every line of his blanched face, in his shrinking figure as he clung to the law he had battled against all his life, personified in the quiet officer who could give him no protection. When the deputies passed with Wilkinson in custody, the condemned glanced only once at his former associate, but in the look was a world of malice and exultation. He went out, the heavy doors shut behind him, and, as the last straggler left the room, Brody turned to the Sheriff and said huskily:

"My hoss is hitched back o' th' court-'us, Sheriff. I mus' be ridin'. I want to put fifty miles atwixt me an' this place by sun-up."

"Ride fast," said the officer, "an' keep your eyes skinned."

Together the two men descended the steps and walked to the south side of the quiet plaza, where a powerful black horse champed the bit and moved his head up and down in recognition of their coming.

"He's good," said Brody, with a wan smile, stopping to stroke the tangled mane and purposelessly adjust the stirrup. "He's about all I've got left."

His face was very pale and his lips trembled as he climbed stiffly into the saddle. He turned and held out an awkward hand.

"I did it to save my life, John," he said. "Won't you shake hands?"

The Sheriff stood a moment with folded arms, peering up into the dark face above him.

"I've shook hands with a murderer afore

he dropped through the trap," he rejoined slowly, "but the man I hung were a brave man, though he were a nigger, an' he never went back on his fren's. No, I won't shake."

With a muttered curse, Brody stooped in the saddle and shot out into the darkness. The Sheriff gazed after him musingly a moment, then, shaking his head, walked away.

It was a cloudy night and there was no moon to cast shadows. On the wide white road that led away from the town was only dusky stillness. The sand glimmered faintly and the ragged bushes stood dwarfed and silent witnesses of the race against death. A slow wind was abroad that murmured softly over the lonely stretches, as if crooning a whispered warning.

Sitting low in the saddle, every pound of him disposed to best advantage, crouched to afford the least possible mark for a bullet; with slouched hat pulled over his eyes; with quick glances roaming to and fro,

ahead, on either side; starting at the slightest rustle; glaring apprehensively at the black stumps of decayed trees; praying that the dark might last and no starlight come; stealing a hand down now and then to feel the Winchester hugged close under his knee, State's Evidence sped along.

The perspiration rolled from his freckled forehead and fell on the wetter withers of the horse. The saddle creaked under the rapid motion and it seemed to the fugitive that the roll of the hoofs might be heard for miles. The cactus flew past him in grotesque shapes and the thorny overhanging limbs of the huisache clutched at him with murderous detaining grasp.

"When I reach th' Motte de Osa," he whispered, "I'm safe."

The thickets had grown denser and the road harder and dimmer. He could compute the miles behind him by the increasing wildness and desolateness of the land through which he was passing. His horse, as he had said, was a good one, but it was

flesh and blood and was failing under the strain. There was no longer the buoyant feel under the saddle. The gallant neck drooped; the ears, sure indication of fatigue, were rigid and pointed forward. There was labor in the heavy breath, and fast coming exhaustion in the weakened stride. Ahead was an elevation, just a gentle rise, and clothed with chaparral to the summit.

"I will walk him to the top," muttered Brody.

He checked the sobbing brute and plodded slowly upward. He reached the ridge, glanced hurriedly about, hung outlined for a moment against the dark sky—and dropped from the saddle dead.

Two spiteful snaps of fire preceded, two sharp reports were simultaneous with the passing. A horse in terror thundered down the road. So sudden was it that man and beast seemed to have melted into air. There was a rustle in the undergrowth, and the wind that blew softly was all that

moved. No form approached the dead thing. Far on the breeze came the short excited barking of the night fox. The mass of vapor overhead rifted for a moment and a star shone on the hard face that was still forever.

ON A CHRISTMAS MORN.

BY WAY OF EXPLANATION.

The ranger force of Texas is singular. There is none other in the world like it. The Rio Grande troopers are mounted deputy sheriffs, having the right of arrest in any county of the Commonwealth. They wear no uniform. They come from every section of the Union and are always younger than middle life. Many of them are well educated. Yale, Harvard, or Princeton graduates are in the ranks—put there, of course, by a desire for adventure. The pay for privates is \$30 a month, for corporals \$35, for a sergeant \$50, for a lieutenant \$75, and for a captain \$100. Each man furnishes a horse, arms, blankets, and clothing. He and his mount are fed by the State. If a horse is killed in action the State replaces it; if it dies from sickness, exposure, or fatigue the ranger must buy another. For many years the appropriation for maintenance of these troops has been inadequate. They now number not

more than seventy-five men, rank and file, divided into five companies. They are of necessity nomadic, dwelling sometimes in the open air, with no roof save the brilliant Southern sky. As their duties are the pursuit and arrests of desperadoes and incursionists from Mexico, they move at a moment's notice with a rapidity and endurance which are the wonder and envious admiration of the United States cavalry stationed here and there along the tortuous Rio Grande. Rides of ninety miles straight on end are not uncommon. Few as the rangers are, they patrol and enforce the law on much more than a thousand miles of frontier. Owing to the fact that each of them carries his life in the hollow of his hand, that a blurred eye or a trembling finger would be practical suicide, they are generally temperate, but coldly reckless and disregarding of human life. In the ranger service of Texas, as in all other military services, personal courage is a thing of course.

CHAPTER I.

HOW HE CAME.

They did not believe that his name was Wayne. He gave it with steady persistence during the few months he was with them, but it never struck any of them that he might be telling the truth. You see, asking a man's name on the frontier is a mere formula, filling the place of "I hope you are quite well." So many of the Rio Grande residents have good reason for the alias that it has come to be a recognized custom to leave the old name behind with the old life.

His long and angular shadow fell across the monte blanket spread flat upon the ground, and the edge of his ragged sombrero touched the knave the Sergeant had covered with all that remained of a month's salary.

"Who are you?" queried that functionary, gruffly, looking up.

"Charles Wayne," he said.

"Where you goin'?"

"Goin' west."

"Well," with an expressive gesture, "yonder's the settin' sun. Git!"

Charles Wayne sat down resignedly on the Sergeant's gorgeous blanket, rolled up and stowed somewhat aside out of reach of more plebeian bodies, took a plug of black tobacco from his pocket, bit off a piece, contemplatively chewed, then spat and spake:

"I hev traveled fur," he said, wearily. "Sometimes on foot, sometimes on a horse, but mostly on foot. I haven't had a perticular place to go to, but I've kept goin'. I'm a mighty tired man, an' I ain't goin' no further. I'm hungry, an' I haven't slept none since last winter. There ain't no water in the land, an' my shoes are worn out. This country is all hills an' thorns. You're the first white man I see this week an' more. I've run with greasers until I doubt whether I'm an Amerikin myself. An' I ain't goin' no further."

He looked around with a wide open and

moist gray eye, his jaws worked placidly, and he settled more comfortably on the blanket.

"Got no cheek," said the Sergeant, gloomily; "but we've plenty to eat an' won't move for a week. Just keep settin' on that blanket till you grow to it. Darby, git on with the deal. If that jack falls with his head to the east the money's mine."

Wayne made no response. He was apparently deep in past errors and resolving to do better. His large, bony hands were clasped loosely around his knees; his chest sunk in and head drooped forward. He had the air of a weary man. He was not at all good to look at. His face was long, sallow, and thin. His hat had fallen from his head, and his stubbly iron-gray hair stood up straight and stiff. Just over the right temple was a bushy lock of silvery whiteness. His ears were large, red, and bent forward. Sometimes, when he sat erect and got them between one and the light, they had a frightened look, as of some hunted rodent. When spoken to

suddenly, his hand wandered to his mouth in an aimless fashion, and rubbed slowly back and forth. He was an unsuccessful man, his face said, and a silent one, much tried and buffeted, given to long musings and profitless adventures.

He sat there seemingly content. Presently he took a childish interest in the game. When a player won, a shifting sympathetic smile spread over his face. When another lost, he frowned and jerked his leg impatiently. He had become so rapt in his intentness that first one noticed him and then another until almost the whole attention of the men centered on him. The only exceptions were the dealer, who, in monte, was a purely business man, and a lithe-limbed, black-eyed young fellow, Cavin by name and known as The Youth, who had lost steadily.

The gloom had fallen slowly, and long, dusky shadows were dancing among the mesquite. The horses stood huge and indistinct in the background, and, save for a sudden half-neigh or impatient stroke of

the fore foot, were stilled for the night. The winking stars had stolen out one by one and shone bright and cool in the rarefied air. The new moon, a thready crescent, hung poised above the red flush in the west. There was a solemn stir in the dense leaves. The tender limbs swayed, but the rugged cacti stood stiff and straight, higher than a man's head, and refused to listen to the wooing of the breeze. They were ghostly sentinels grouped in the dark, watching with steady heads and rigid, outstretched arms the intent game. The swirls of smoke drifted in the faces of the players and swept away, leaving a pungent scent behind. Now and again a flaring spark dropped on the blanket and was hurriedly brushed aside.

"Don't do that! For God's sake, don't do that!" said Charles Wayne, grasping The Youth's wrist. "Don't never put it on the seven when they ain't nary ace out. You'll lose certain—certain!"

"What's that to you?" Cavin said, wrenching away. "Whose money is this?"

Who rode for it night an' day? Whose been savin' for this very game? I'll gun you if you do that again."

"You can't learn these fellows anything, Charlie," said the Sergeant, placidly. He had already become familiar with Wayne. "You can't learn 'em anything about monte. I've spent the best part of my wages for two years learnin' 'em, an' they don't know yet—an' me neither," he added, reflectively.

"I thought to myself, maybe," said Wayne, "that if I give him a pointer it might do him some good, but, Lord, he won't take it. These kids know more'n all the old ones put together. Git along with the game, gentlemen, I'm not interruptin'. Git along with the game!"

The party resumed its old attention. The cards flickered down from the dealer's hands and settled lightly on the wrinkled cloth.

"Alcey!" said the dealer, handing the deck to Cavin and indicating with a careless motion of the head that he should cut.

"My alcey!" said another, reaching out a grimy paw. "Seems to me that I ain't had a cut for two months."

"Take it back!" said Cavin, with a dangerous flash in his eyes. "Snatch that fist back!" and, seizing a small switch, he dealt the importunate a savage swish across the knuckles. "They're my cards this time, for sure."

There was an oath from the man struck as he drew back his reddened hand and glared viciously at his peremptory adversary. "Some of these days, Dick Cavin," he said, slowly, "you'll get a bullet through you quicker'n a flash of lightnin' on the prairie by one of them tricks. My gun's in my tent an' my tent's over yonder, an' you knew it, d——n you!"

"Dea!" said the Sergeant, briskly. "You fools are always jawin' an' doin' nothin'. Deal!"

The Youth had up his last cent. His black eyes were glued to the dealer's hands as if he possessed the power of divination. He leaned breathlessly forward, his face

pale, his lips drawn and clammy. There was a nervous twitching in his fingers and he looked like some young and beautiful beast crouching for a spring. The dealer was a large, clumsy, uncouth fellow, with fat and purposeless face, tremendous legs and cumbersome feet. He was loose-jointed and mild looking. He had spent some time around the flash hells of the cities, and was popularly supposed to be a past master in the art of "putting them up." A glance at his expressionless, vacuous visage would have reassured any one, but the men in camp told marvelous tales of his finesse and the tremendous raids he had made on the Mexican gambling booths at the fiestas. Hence, Cavin watched him and was prepared to believe almost any impossible act of defraudment or theft.

"We'll take a square deal, Darby," he said, feverishly. "I'll cover the queen. She's never gone back on me yet, an'," he added, significantly, "I don't want her to this time."

Darby gazed at him with his fish-like

eyes, taking a minute inventory of what he had said and what it implied; then, hitching a belt he wore around him and glancing down to see the weapon it suspended, resumed the deal.

The cards fell slowly, but with the remorselessness of fate. To Cavin with his all staked on their chances, the painted faces seemed some to wear grins of mockery and others looks of warning. They made no sound as they came down, but every noiseless settle on the blanket beat in on his brain and throbbed in his heart with the stroke of a hammer. Once the Sergeant, fancying he saw something shifty and uncertain in the dealer's fingers, nudged his elbow, but he paid no heed. He, too, had probably seen it. It was what is termed a "long deal," that is, no winning or losing card had slipped from the dealer's carelessly careful hands. He, the impassive embodiment of destiny, gave no sign of the tumult within him. His fat face was unpaled, his expressionless eyes as lightless, his steady wrists as skillful as

at the beginning of the game. He sighed wearily once or twice, as the cards brought no settlement of the issue, but dropped back into stolidity. When all eyes were fixed on him—and he bore their scrutiny well; when he saw the pale face and blazing eyes of his adversary—and he never blenched—when he knew that if he won he would have to shoot his way to life—and he gave no sign of his thought; the gaudy king dropped slowly in his front.

“Queen loses,” he said, sententiously, and reached out a hand for the money. His arm was struck away, and he confronted the maniac loser.

“You cheated,” screamed The Youth, his face blood-red and his weapon in his hand. “I saw it with my own eyes. You drew it from the middle. I saw it. Take that.”

The weapon, a glittering line of light in the flashing fire, covered Darby squarely and flame burst from it as its owner pulled the trigger. With the shattering report,

the receding men and trembling horses saw intended murder—and its foiling.

A tall, ungainly form had bounded in front of the loser, a long arm had struck up the pistol, a sad strained voice had called, "For God's sake!" and, with the drifting of the smoke, the impassive dealer stood unharmed, while Charles Wayne wiped the blood from a bullet graze on his cheek. In another instant Cavin was grasped by a dozen hands, hurled to the ground, deprived of his weapon, bound and borne shrieking to the ragged provision tent to spend the slow night in company of army bacon and coffee and lard and crackers and rats.

"It was a square deal, an' you all saw it," said Darby, conscientiously pocketing the money. "That feller don't play no more at my game."

"You needn't go no further west, Charlie," said the Sergeant, gazing admiringly at the placid Wayne, as he cleaned his face with a new flannel shirt which one of the men in temporary excitement had lent him.

"You did it well. If you've a mind to ride, there's your horse. If you've a mind to work with us, the job is yours. If you want to come with us, say so."

"I'll come," said Wayne.

CHAPTER II.

WHY HE CAME.

He leaned far forward in his saddle and was talking. There had been a heavy rain and the horses plodded and slipped patiently. The gouts of mud on the Sergeant's heavy boots and the flying drops of water spurted by the hoofs claimed a good share of his attention, but he was a patient man, albeit a rough rider, and he listened fairly well.

Wayne had improved to an appreciable extent since his introduction to the service. He had lost something of his wearied look and his clothes were new and substantial. He rode with the spraddling seat of a man more accustomed to the plow than to the

scout's saddle. He had girthed around him a broad belt, containing a number of metallic cartridges, and a new and shining six-shooter, the which he seemed to regard with grave distrust. He had long been made acquainted with the inner mysteries of camp cookery, midnight round-ups, forays, pursuits, court attendance and jail duty. He had known something of the wild joy of the rush in the warm midnight, and had seen in the early morning the law's relentless grapple with its pale fugitive. He had borne himself with a kind of blind faith in his tutors and blind recklessness of consequences to himself. He seemed to be possessed of sufficient vitality to stand the forced rides and never complained of anything. He was a good man to have around camp, being always willing to lend a helping hand. Perhaps it was his freedom from all save the nominal restraint of a service wherein discipline is practically absent; perhaps it was the discovery of his ability to earn his rations and warm clothes; perhaps it was the effect of the

bracing air, or the rough work, or the companionship, such as it was. At any rate, an indefinable quantity of his old painful uncertainty had gone from him. He still had the shifting motions of the hands, and his light gray eyes wandered uneasily to the Sergeant's face, but there was something in him that marked a change. There had germinated in his brain a hopeful idea which gave some relief to facial muscles long drawn, or there had come to him some faint inner suggestion of a better and higher purpose than had yet moved him; or a capability for something better and higher.

He had elected to make a confidant of the Sergeant, though he seldom talked long to any one. No doubt the officer wished he had chosen some other. Long after Wayne had finished that which he had to say his companion was given to impatient snorts and thrusts of the spur, and sudden dartings across the road, which he generally ended by jerking and lashing his horse in a very savage manner.

The masses of mesquite were green with a luscious color under the leaden sky. They stretched away an unbroken tangle for miles on either hand. Their tops waved together in the slight breeze, and the feathery frondage was an undulating sea of emerald over which swift shadows raced and queer dancing dimples of shade. So green was it, so beautiful in its wild abandonment and loneliness, so free from any hint of defilement, that it looked like a bosky mirror into which one might gaze and half expect to see reflected a shifting face green-tinted. The rugged, prickly pear, whose broad elliptical leaves were spiked and forbidding, grew in uncouth clusters. Its red flowers showed in the undergrowth like clots of blood. It lent an element of harshness to the scene. The snouted peccary crossed the road in front, or a deer, his brown hide draggled by passage through the leaves, stood a moment as though beautifully carved from clay, then leaped into the brush with the speed of light. The rain-crow on either hand

was hoarsely calling, and the monotonous iteration and reiteration of the cicada was on the air. The chaparral cock, with tufted head, darted uneasily in and out of the undergrowth, or fled by some narrow pathway on feet which scarce touched the ground. The splashy steps of the horses punctuated Wayne's droning words:

"I'm an officer of the law now, Sergeant; you made me one; an' I say an officer must keep his mouth shut if he wants to live and do well; but it was only a triflin' matter, an' it was a long time ago, an' I don't mind talkin' to you, bein' as you are my friend. I was a likely man enough six years back an' more, an' I was a handsome man, too. Better lookin' than Cavin, who is so flip with his pop, an' better lookin' than any of these young fools girdin' at me all day long. I owned a little farm back in the East counties, an' I worked her like a nigger. It was give to me by my father, an' I allowed to stay on it as long as I lived.

"The crop was fair six years ago, an' I was happy. I had some money in bank

an' was puttin' in more. I didn't drink no liquor, an' I didn't play no cards—them days. Every blessed Sunday that come 'round found me at the little log meetin' house, an' I throwed as much into the hat as I was able, seldom, if ever, forgettin'.

"There moved in near my place a man that said he come from Mizzouri, an' he had the prettiest girl I ever saw—an' no money. I was forty years old, but when I saw her at meetin' my heart turned to water an' run out to her. I said to myself:

" 'Pretty little woman, I want you at my house'—an' I acted accordin'.

"What'd I do? I went up to her and I said: 'My name is Charles Wayne, madame, an' if agreeable I'd like to keep you company home.' Don't see anything to laugh at in that, do you? An' she looked down shy, an' her old dad gave his consent, an' we walked home together. I eat my dinner there. It was a dinner she cooked—she didn't have no mother—an' it

was good. I drove her to singin' school that night, an' I took her home.

"The breeze was blowin' soft an' low an' the stars made the skies white. It was a lovely night. Over the tops of the pine trees the young moon hung, an' one little branch cut her across the face. There was flowers on the air, for it was spring, an' the creek where we stopped to water the old horse looked like silver. I remember as we drove through the woods we waked a dove that had its nest by the road, an' it sat there an' cooed till we were out of hearin'.

"I told her about the people an' the country, an' said I was glad she had come down to stay, an' she allowed that she was glad, too; an' I felt big inside, like I could drive that wagon right over the trees. We had many a ride after that, but none like that one. Lord, Lord! it seems so long ago."

The Sergeant sighed sentimentally and spurred his horse. Wayne cleared his throat and looked aimlessly ahead. Per-

haps in his ugly eyes there were tears. A slow drizzle had recommenced and the whole landscape was sad-colored. The limbs had lost their verdant tinge and seemed drenched and pallid. Down the horses' smoking necks and shoulders little streams were running and the ceaseless drip-drip of the water from the leaves pattered a monotonous accompaniment to his dispirited voice.

"One night—it was in the summer, an' the sun was burnin' hot all day—I asked her to marry me, an' she said she would. It was a hard year on stock and her old man lost pretty near all he had, so he made no objection. She was a modest little girl, an' she wanted to wait till late fall, but I wouldn't hear to it. You bet, I wouldn't! The neighbors come in droves to see old Charlie Wayne yoked an' eat old Charlie Wayne's grub. There was a sight of feedin' an' drinkin' an' dancin', an' the preacher got so full he had to be hauled home. My little wife was pale an' happy lookin'.

"She told me once that night, when I was dancin' with her, an' bowin' an' scrap-in' an' sasshayin' backward an' forward, that she was goin' to do her levellest to make our little home comfortable; an' while she was there, so help me God, it was a palace. I rose early every week day, an' I worked the fool mules till night, an' never cussed nor beat 'em—I never felt like it. When I unhitched the team, when the sun was hangin' low in the west, an' rode up the lane, I always found her standin' in the front door with her sleeves rolled up an' her arms all flour waitin' to give me a kiss afore I bedded down for the night.

"She was happy as a lark, an' as for me, God help me, I was too happy!

"About four months after we were married, or maybe five, there come an angel light into her eyes, an' her cheek was like the dogrose all day long. She told me one night what was the matter, and cried when she told it. An' when our baby came, Sergeant, I was the happiest old fool in seven States. It was a girl, a little brown-eyed

girl, that laid an' blinked an' laughed. An' I worked harder'n a nigger.

"It was two years after in the early fall. I come to the house in the evenin's dark with a big load of corn, the last. All the way up from the field a picture kept runnin' in my head of the little wife at the door, with her hair blown about, an' the bright fire behind her, and the tangle-headed kid laughin' an' jumpin' in her arms. I turned the bend in the road an' the house was still an' dark. No light in the windows, no smoke rollin' an' tumblin' from the chimney, no wife an' baby in the door. The mules struck a trot, though I never touched 'em. I jumped from the wagon with my heart in my mouth an' my eyes starin' straight ahead. It was blacker'n hell inside. I found the matchbox after I fell over a chair or two, an' struck a light. It was all empty an' cold. With every drop of blood in me turned to a stabbin' icicle, I looked through the three rooms an' out in the back yard. I called out loud. No answer. I went back to the front room

an' set down. Then I saw a scrap of paper on the table lyin' under the edge of the Bible I bought to put our baby's name in. A little scrap, but bigger to me than any volume ever writ. You know what it was! My wife an' baby were gone! She did not say she had stopped lovin' me—that wasn't needful, I knew it. She didn't say she loved anybody else—she was too pure a woman, an' I knew that wasn't so. She did not say she was sick or crazy, or changed from the tender wife to a tearin', gougin' wild beast. She just said:

“‘My Dear Husband: Baby and I have gone away. It was so lonely when you were in the field. We are not coming back. Supper is in the safe, and the keys are under the pillow. Forgive us.’”

Wayne had reached into the bosom of his shirt and extracted a piece of dirty paper, colored and yellow with age. He looked at it with his pale eyes and handed it to his companion. The Sergeant took it, scrutinized it as if seeking some trace of the missing woman, turned it over,

looked at its blank side, folded it with heavily gloved fingers, and gave it back. "D——d queer!" he muttered, "but just like a woman. You can't never make 'em bridle-wise. Break 'em with a curb an' they rare an' fall back on you. Break 'em with a snaffle, an' they bolt hellwestern crooked."

"When I read that note," said Wayne, "I sprung from the chair like a man had shot me through the head. I looked out of my door and there were streaks of fire on the night. It was clear an' cool, but the stars shifted an' spun like one of these toys of colored glass you hold to your eye. There was one in the house I bought for the baby, an' I thought of it even then. My throat was parched an' an iron band was round my breast. God, how near death seemed!

"I thought of the rifle that hung on the wall an' what a blessed thing it would be to send my brains spatterin'; of the deep, sluggish creek not a hundred yards from the house an' how cool an' dreamless a

sleep on its bottom would be; of a thousand things in half as many seconds. She was gone; I knew that. She an' baby were gone far away an' were not comin' back. She said that. She was a woman that always spoke her mind. But somehow I couldn't get it into me. When I tried to think which way she went I thought of how the field looked with the stalks stripped of the corn an' the cotton yet unpicked. When I thought of my baby's yellow hair an' brown eyes an' music laugh that I was never to see an' hear again, the words of the fool hymn we had sung together at last meetin' kep' ding-dongin' in my head; 'Marchin' in the cross, marchin' in the cross; your soul git lost, your soul git lost.'

"With the thought that maybe they hadn't been gone long I jumped for a horse and galloped like a crazy man down the road. The wind that blew up while I was standin' stupid came straight in my face, lashed my cheeks, an' moaned in the tops of the tall trees. I hit the creek like a bullet an' got over it, I don't know how. Old

familiar fields swept by me an' the zigzag rail fences looked as straight as a rule. Heavy boughs hit me an' I never felt 'em. The leaps of the horse when he crossed ditches or stumps never stirred me in the saddle. His heavy pantin' begot no mercy in me. I lashed him with the reins an' drove my heels into him, beat him with my fists an' prayed for a weapon that I might kill him. I remember that once I raised my hand to my mouth an' bit it till the blood run down an' fell on the pommel of the saddle.

"It was mornin' and the whole earth was as sad as my face an' soul, when I found I was in a prairie country, open with no timber in sight; an' I knew I was far from home. I got down an' stood by the side of the road an' cursed my wife and child an' self, an' God. Then I mounted the poor beast, that shook an' trembled under me, an' rode slowly away. I would never go back, I made up my mind, an' I never did. The place was of no use to me. I had worked it for all it was worth. I had spent

my sweat on it. I had built me up a happy home, an' this was what it brought me. The walls that were hung with pictures my wife had cut out an' pasted with her own hands were blank to me, an' I hated 'em. The chickens an' dogs my baby had fed an' loved were all left alone, and I wanted 'em to die. If the house would burn up, I thought, or a rain of fire from Heaven come down an' blast the farm so that nothin' could find a livin' there, I would like it. I sold my horse, for I had no money, an' went after my wife on foot. I asked people I met, but nobody had seen her. Some of 'em looked at me kind of queer, an' others laughed an' said she'd gone with a han'-somer man—addin' that she couldn't well go with an uglier—but I paid no heed to 'em an' I s'pose now that I had ridden so far out of her track all chance of findin' her was lost. I never heard word nor saw sign of her from that day to this. I wrote back to the old place once an' learned that strangers had rented it from my cousin. He is welcome to the money, but I pity the fam-

ily that lives there, for the house is cursed an' I know they are cursed, too.

"That's why I'm here. I don't never expect to find my wife, nor the little baby girl that climbed on my knee an' talked to me like the cooin' of the wind. Maybe they're better off than dependin' on an old man for a livin'. If I could find 'em, my wife might live apart if she chose—but I want to see my baby that come to me like an angel in the dark, an' went away like one of them beautiful dreams you can't recollect next mornin'."

"Charlie," said the Sergeant, "you've had a hard row to hoe."

CHAPTER III.

HOW HE WENT.

The Sergeant stood straight and tall by the leaping camp-fire and extended one long, powerful arm above his head. He was between Wayne and the sunset and reminded him of one of the fire-blackened

piners he had known "back in the East counties."

"You hear me speak, Charlie?" he said, pointing to a thin web of gossamer that floated overhead, "that means a norther. More'n that, this old back of mine, that I've been totin' 'round for thirty years an' more, says so; an' what that back says I'll swear to."

"Me, too," said Wayne.

"I disremember now," resumed the Sergeant, "whether it was in '79 or '80, but one or the other. We were makin' a most unholy ride from Ysleta straight down the Bravo. I was ridin' along an' dreamin' to myself about Dolores Garcia, which I had danced with in Paso the night before, when somethin' gripped me in the back. The norther caught us in three hours. Since that time the signal service inside of my shirt has never failed to telegraph me when to look out for the blue wind that comes down on a man and runs around him like a knife with a saw-edge on it. That was Christmas eve; which reminds me that this

is Christmas eve, an' we've got a hard ride ahead of us."

"Where to?" inquired Wayne, listlessly.

The Sergeant thought, as he looked at him, sprawled by the fire, that he had never seen him appear lazier or more shiftless, and he had unlimited capabilities in that line.

"Down the Pena," he said, shortly.

"What's up?"

"Well, there's an American rustler started him a ranch down there. I heard it from Manuel Diego, who knows him well. We've been wantin' him for two years and over. Killed a man, or stole a horse, or somethin', I forget exactly what, but I know we want him."

He took a paper from the pocket of his short coat and unfolded it, read it carefully, and announced that his quarry's name was Skaggs, "which," he added, "is by no means a pretty name, but it's better lookin' than the man, I reckon."

"I'd like to stay in camp, Sergeant," said

Wayne, "my horse is poor, an' I feel slimsy myself."

His hand had gone to his mouth and was bashfully passing back and forth. He glanced at the officer momentarily, then his shifting eyes wandered around the camp, took an exhaustive look at a small shrub which was showing dimly, and dropped to his feet.

"Not to be thought of," declared the Sergeant, "there are only six of us, an' from what I'm told of Skaggs I'll need you all. You'll have to make the horse carry you, Charlie. If he can't do it you'll have to git down and carry him."

* * * * *

It was night. The sun had poised in the west for a space, then dived, like a swimmer to his plunge, and the gloom settled down. The flashing tongues of the fire painted the surrounding limbs in streaks of red, and tiny sparks soared heavenward and died. The sky was a steely black, and the stars winked chillily. There was no

moon. A light rack of gray vapor preceded the norther, but had long since drifted away. It was bitter cold. The blasts of wind cut like whips and leaped at the men's cheeks in a succession of stings. They were huddled around the fire, amid a mixture of old saddles, bridles, blankets, tin cups, canteens, overturned coffee pots, and smutty, greasy cooking vessels. They were waiting for the word to move, which the Sergeant had said would be given at 1 o'clock.

"It is ten miles to the Skaggs ranch," he said. "Slow ridin' will git us there by 3, which is as soon as I want; an' too soon for some of you," with a hostile stare at Wayne.

That member of the troop was, as usual, lying down, his ungainly legs sprawled in seemingly interminable length along his blanket, the worn saddle, that had served him for the past months, under his head, and his rusty boots showing huge in the half-light. He turned wearily and gave

the Sergeant a deprecating glance. Speaking was too great an exertion.

"It seems to me," said The Youth, "that Charlie is gettin' mighty no account. That old crow-bait of his would have starved to death yesterday if somebody hadn't fed it; an' I had to chop the wood that's keepin' his worthless bones warm now."

"Never paid me that two dollars," interjected Darby. "Lost it fair. Swore he could pick up the right card for four bits, didn't do it. Swore he could pick it up for a dollar'n a half, lost again. You all saw it. Never paid me yet. You saw it, Cavin;" but Cavin, remembering his own disastrous raid on Darby's treasury, declined to back the statement.

"I've seen low-down greasers playin' three-card," he said, "but never any decent white men. The man who bucks against that kind of game is a fool; the man who runs it is worse than a fool; an'," illogically, "there ain't anything worse."

Darby's slow crackling chuckle answered him. "An' a man," he said "who bets al-

ways on the queen, an' never on anything but the queen, is two fools rolled into one, an' that's worse. What you all say to a little deal now?"

But the wind had increased in violence. It had grown from isolated gusts to a steady peal of air that made monte dealing impossible.

It seemed to Wayne that he had never seen a worse night. He lay where the smoke poured over him in a blinding stream. "Because," as he said, "no one would bother him there."

The gale boomed across the prairie for miles to the north and struck the timber line of mesquite with fury. The gnarled branches intertwined and shrieked as if under the surgeon's knife. They looked like sentient things as they writhed in the darkness, with ghastly voices of pain. Every limb bore its burden of pale leaves mingled with poisonous thorns, and they rasped and stabbed each other in very impotency. The Sergeant, whose prophetic back had sent forth its warning,

squatted on the ground and moaned, rising in crescendo until he reached a savage shout of execration, then sinking to a pitiful murmur. The wordy jars of his subordinates interested him not. If the camp had pulled its weapons and butchered itself on the spot, he would have looked on an approving spectator. He heard no loved voices in the storm, nor listened to the rebellious baritone of the aerial organ. Save for his tremulous wails, he was almost as still as the worn old man on the farther side of the fire, who hated so to take the ride.

"When I get across that old gray, if I don't put my spurs into him an' make him eat up the groun', you may call my dad's boy a liar"—thus the Sergeant.

Wayne smiled slowly as he heard him. "Seems to me, Sergeant," he said, "that I wouldn't have a weather clerk inside of me for anything. A strappin', hearty young fellow, too. Here am I, an older man, an' maybe an uglier man—may be so, may be not—but my back don't have

the misery for a little wind. Whyn't you lead a sober an' godly life—an' put off this ride for about five months, when the weather 'll be warmer an' my horse seal fat?"

"I'll catch our man to-night," said the Sergeant, "or he'll catch me—or maybe you," with a steady stare at the moralist.

"I'm not afraid of that," said Wayne. "I'm a heap more afraid of some of the fool boys in this crowd, always turnin' their guns loose for nothin' in God Almighty's world but to hear 'em sing. 'You just stand off, my friends,' says I, 'an' I'll corral all my enemies.' That's what I say."

He turned, with the black smoke surging into his queer eyes, and spat disgustedly into the fire.

The stars in their infinite courses had shifted and the night had attained an added black, the wind a fiercer fury. Far off, smit by the heavy storm, arose the tremulous cry of the coyote as he crouched shivering in the long grass. The crowded, broken, tangled notes sounded like the eldritch voicings of a maniac spirit. They

came sweeping down the wind, and Wayne half rose to his feet. He had been some months in the southwestern country, but had never outgrown the electric sensation produced by the night cries of the little animal that skulks by day. The Sergeant looked around eagerly, and the men rose slowly in obedience to his glance.

"Time to be off," he said. "Darby, you were on herd to-day. Bring up only the riding stock; we will take no pack to-night."

The professional stumbled away briskly into the dark. He soon returned, leading six horses by the stake-ropes. They were bridled and saddled with incredible rapidity. Each man stood a moment in the fire-light and examined his weapons and cartridge belt. The line of metal tubes around their waists looked like girdles of gold. Wayne had moved more slowly than the rest. As he arose he thrust a discolored piece of paper into his shirt. As he turned to mount he passed one misshapen, grimy hand across his eyes.

"Seems to me," muttered Cavin, as the party, the Sergeant in the lead, moved into the night, "seems to me that Charlie's gettin' chicken-hearted. When a man gets that way in this profession he's gone. He come mighty near stoppin' a bullet for me once. Some time he'll stop one for somebody else."

"This is Christmas eve, Charlie," hazarded another. "Did you hang up your stockin' in the tent?"

"More likely he was calculatin' how much he could spend for a picture of a red and blue saint to carry in his boot," said another. He chuckled, and the others followed his lead.

Wayne sat in his saddle like a bag and said nothing. He was used to the rough chaff of the camp, and rarely replied. Perhaps he did not understand the half of it. He was a plain man, and by no means a religious one. His life had been full of errors; but he had been bred by old-fashioned, God-fearing parents, and in a community of religionists. Through the grime

of his ignorance and later life of recklessness still sprouted some remnants of the old teachings. He was bent on an errand of justice, possibly of murder. It was work which in that state of society, or rather lack of society's restraints, was rigidly necessary. He had heard of him whom they were hunting. His name had filled in many an idle pause around the camp-fire. He had heard him called drunkard, thief, and murderer, the terror of isolated border communities, the assassin of men who, unarmed, had pleaded to him for life, the successful breaker of the law and evader of the law's pursuit. He had heard, too, that he was married and had children, married to an honest, ignorant country girl, whose heart he had broken, and of whom he had made a beast of burden. There was pity for him, though, in Wayne's heart. He knew that the man was apt to resist arrest, and that resistance to his fierce and business-like companions meant bloody death. It seemed to him that their journey was horridly out of joint with the time,

The wind had died almost down, and the stars shone crisp and clear. The ground was frozen stiff and the hoof-beats sounded musically. With his wife and child again in his arms, the wanderer, hardened as he was, could have knelt to the kind Dispensing Power and blessed it. He had heard of the child in the manger and the watching herdsmen. He thought that possibly it might have been on such a night, and in such a wide-plained and brown country that the holy tidings came. He had been much given to thinking of late; he did not know why or of what he thought. There was nothing in common between him and his associates. They were rough, and wild, and hard; free of speech and ready of hand. He was a tender, trusting, faithful man by nature, with a certain immovable inertness in him that might have passed for determination. He had seen blood spilled during his short life as a State soldier—on one occasion had been forced to assist in shedding it—and he hated it. He looked out over the wastes, as his horse wearily kept

pace with the others, and sighed. He remembered that on Christmas eve three years ago he had pinned with his own clumsy hand his baby's tiny stocking to the mantel, and filled it with such sweetmeats and cheap toys as he could afford. He remembered the dancing light in the brown eyes on the following morn; its eager clutches at the treasures, and the pleased look on his quiet wife's face. He brushed his hand across his eyes again, and hoped that in the dark nobody had seen him.

He straightened in his saddle and tried to think of something else. Then there came to him the remembrance of how he had spent his last Christmas eve, in a Western village, with but little money, no acquaintances, and beastly drunk. He had gone to the little church where the gift-tree festivities were in progress, and, minding not the happy child faces round him, had blinked and leered and foolishly laughed at all the minister said, until the deacon had come to him and led him stumbling out. It made him very sorrowful, and he inward-

ly said that he would never again so squander what was left of his manhood, but in the hope that some day he might again feel his baby's arms around his neck, would lead a sober life, and keep clean for the meeting.

There was an odd sense of exultation in him now. He seemed to rise in the saddle with the movements of his horse, and felt young and strong again. The still cold was in his blood. His bridle fingers were stiffened, and he rubbed them unconsciously with his other hand, but he felt no ache. He must find his people, and they would have a very happy life. There should be no recrimination; no wordy jarring; no blame. He would take his wife and child to his breast, and tell them only how glad he was to get them back.

"She never spoke a hard word to me," he whispered, "why should I?"

And Christ and His tender mother and the angels were abroad. A suggestion of good was in the air and a murmur of infinite peace and content in the rustling of the leaves. There was a laugh of benefi-

cence and joy in the winking of the sky's brilliants. The very tramp of the steeds seemed to mark time to some sweet promise fulfilled. In his head ran the words of a long-metered hymn he had often heard in the happy, stainless long ago—"Jesus died on Calvary. He was very kind to me."

He could see the bare old church amid the sweet-smelling pines, the rapt and quiet faces of the elder people of the congregation, the smiles of the younger, the white-haired minister bowed down in silent prayer at the further end; hear the choral swell of the voices; listen again to the slumberous murmur of the breeze among the needled branches. Near the place there ran a little laughing creek. He had known it when but a child. Was it the water's music that he heard now, with its tiny plashing over the smoothed pebbles—that? There, ahead in the dark, was the log he used to cross long before he saw his faithless wife. What sounds were those which rose from the massy chaparral? What words were whispered in his ear by the kindly angel

that flitted by him and fanned him with its wings? "Jesus died on Calvary. He was very kind to me—kind to me—kind to me." Was that a star which hung so low upon the prairie, and far? It was too red, and had no twinkle. Was it a light? Had the time come?

"Close up!" said the Sergeant.

They moved quietly forward, and as they moved they knew it shone from a small cabin perched on a rise, free from the strangling brush. With a bound they were off together. The hoofs rolled with a thunderous swell like the beatings of a crack drum corps. Where were his dreams now? All forgotten. Wayne was but human, and the hunter lust was in him. With the sweep of fate they went down on the devoted house. The fierce longing of the beast for its prey was in them. Cavin's face showed in the dark, set with a fangy smile. They could see the low roof now, a sharp line against the sky. The Sergeant in front, on the white horse, led the way with mighty leaps. The stars raced over them in streaks

of fire. The biting air roughed their cheeks like a file. Every drop of blood in them was a bounding globule of flame. They sat low in the saddles and peered eagerly forward. Now and again some one of them straightened up and restlessly drew further to the front the weapon that swung at his waist. Under their knees they felt the Winchesters in the long scabbards, and pressed them close. Jets of steam rose from the beasts' nostrils and were left behind, light flecks of momentary mist. With a rush and a whirl and a thunderous clank and clatter, they dashed at the door.

"Open in the name of the law," commanded the Sergeant, using the set demand.

"Who be ye?" quavered a woman's frightened voice.

"Open to the law, or we'll smash the door."

"To h—l, you cowardly dogs," came in gruff tones.

The Sergeant raised his rifle and hurled the heavy butt against the stout planking.

He was answered by a shot from the inside. Darby, always cool, placed the muzzle of his pistol to the lock and shattered it. The door swung back with a crash, and they bounded in. They were confronted by a giant of a man, with red beard straggling to his breast. A frightened, wan-eyed woman crouched in the corner, holding a baby in her arms. Two pale children sat speechless on the ragged bed.

"Throw up your hands," snapped the Sergeant, with leveled weapon.

The man looked at him furiously, stood pondering a moment, then yelled: "You've hunted me like a dog! You can't take me!" and stared stanchly. A little child, with touzled yellow hair, pattered across the floor and was snatched to his bosom. The Youth, all the brute in him surging to his tiger eyes, threw his Winchester to his shoulder and mercilessly pressed the trigger. There was a rushing in the air, an inarticulate cry—was it of warning, or terror, or triumph?—an angular shape in front of the tongue of smoke and fire, and

Wayne, a writhing thing upon the floor, with a bullet in the back. Already the choking blood rattled in his throat. And the child with yellow hair was safe.

"The little child—the little child—" he moaned—"Jane, I've found you at last—the plowin's almost done—Jesus died——"

He closed his eyes, and his lean and wrinkled face was beautiful. The stars were paling in the east; and it was Christmas-tide, and its white glory was on the world.

THE INSULT OF AN ANCESTRY.

Charles Hornung was a Southerner born, but not a Texan. Between him and the people he found himself among, there lay as wide diversity as two types may show. His eyes had first seen the Carolina rice-fields, and the spirit that grew with his growth was indicative of the strains of his blood. The rusty swords of his father and his grandfather, and his great-grandfather's father hung above the wide fireplace in the hall. Sweet-faced ancestresses looked down from the walls of every chamber. Old writings had come to him and he treasured them, for they told him that his race had been a true race through many dead years before the foam of the western Atlantic wet the prow of the vessel that bore the first of his name to America. The few negroes about the place, when it went to another, called him "Marse Char-

lie," and the old horse that had borne the elder Hornung through four years of civil strife, tenderly cared for and not bestridden, had died the day before he set his face to the west.

His boyhood passed amid scenes of what he was taught to believe had once been grandeur. The low-lying fields, the acres of swamp, the groves of frondage had all been his and were his no longer, but he still had left a chivalric reverence for women, a pity for all that was weak, and a tender admiration for the lovely. He had also an implicit belief in the departed glories of his tribe and land, a distaste for that which was new and uncouth, a high regard for himself and a want of understanding of the needs and possible productions of strange environments—not a man, you would say, to readily adapt himself to changed conditions and certainly not one to make himself warm in the hearts of strangers.

He was young and clean-limbed, of the swarthy lean type that carries a suggestion of quietude and reserved strength. A life

of some extravagance, and but little good to himself, had brought him to Texas to recuperate health and strength. He nursed the delusion that he was consumptive, and a railway prospectus caught him.

When he saw Centralia it seemed inviting enough. The houses were white-painted, the window-blinds all green and the roofs all a dark red. Most of the buildings had been designed by a traveling architect, with a taste for whisky and the visions it begets. It was a jolly looking place, with a bacchanalian air about the cocked, jostling roofs and merry little windows. Standing upon his hotel piazza, looking down the only street and noting the confused tangle of corners, gables, roofs, chimneys and eaves, Hornung thought of the tremens, and the small houses in the ardent sun danced fantastically before his eyes.

Its people were all from other states, men who had come to look at the country and staid. They spoke with a Northern accent; while the women with the aid of certain colored plates imitated the latest Northern

fashions. It was a thriving community, and the natives who lived on the ranches round about looked and listened wonderingly at its ceaseless activity and gabble. It had not learned to rest, and would not until the third generation. The social features of the town were remarkable for one thing only—the almost utter exclusion of native attractions. At the frequent teas or at the whirling dissipation of the monthly dance in the court-house, few Texan faces were seen and few Texan topics tapised. Those of this transplanted society who alluded to the quiet people, whose money they got, did so in a despairing way as of a race that needed elevation, but whom it was too much trouble to elevate.

They had no attractions for Hornung. They were money-grubbers and gossipers—things he detested; and they were Northerners—things he detested more. Having no respect for his pedigree, declining utterly to be impressed by it, they were frankly anxious as to his dollars. Ascertaining that he was a Southerner, and that various

members of his family had fallen in Southern armies, they elected to talk war to him, expansively condemn slavery and point out the mistakes of Lee. The man was slumberously fiery under a repressed manner, and when he had been dragged into argument and exhausted his presumably weak lungs in denunciation of Federal policy, was treated with amused pity and left with the knowledge that he had made a fool of himself.

He bought him a ranch. It was not an expensive affair, as southwestern ranches go—twenty thousand acres or so—not likely to gain him or lose him much. He knew nothing of cattle-breeding, but was willing to learn. He was willing, too, to go back to the open country he had always loved, and anxious to escape from the oppressive flavor of the county town. It was quiet out there, and the green hills rose around his home in an endless succession of verdant upheavals. It was early summer in the season of his purchase, and there were flowers on them and waving leaves

along an arroya that trenched his possessions and went dry in the torrid summer. He had paid for it as "permanent water." He found joy in the sweep over the prairies, in the long chase of the antelope, with the green grass swishing his horse's hoofs and the soft wind humming in his ears. He grew contented and his old-fashioned fancies were jostled out of his head by contact with the rude active life around him. He learned something every day—learned, though he did not know it, to be a better integral of the human whole. He became patient in speech and noted for kindness to his men and beasts. So much will constant contact with Mother Nature do. There was an indefinable charm in his gentleness, and, though astonished, his rough riders liked the smooth polish of his tones. Having been used to the cattle baron or his immediate underling, they would have gone far and fared hard for him. The pleasant way of making a request of an ordinary command made them think better of themselves.

"He's th'owed away in this country," said Peter, one of the cooks. "He oughter go back home and marry rich." Paul and John, the other cooks, agreed with him—and it may be said here that Hornung did marry rich.

He had ridden far one day and stopped to rest upon the banks of Arroya Pena, lying straight on the green grass with the leaves of the cottonwoods mimicking rain over his head. The wonderful Texan sky was of a deep, painful blue, and white flecks sailed across it, speckled here and there by black dots of wings of the slow-moving vultures. The breeze bore healing for sick frame or mind. Resinous odors were blown from the pine belt fifty miles to the east, and all around was a warm suggestion of growing. With his cheek upon the soft carpet of earth, Hornung heard the beat of rapidly advancing hoofs. He could mark the distinct strokes and judge by their increasing strength the rate at which the rider was coming. He had learned something of the craft of the prairies, and was aware that

the horse was of the pony order and ridden probably by a light weight. He miscalculated, however, the swiftness of the advance. He had determined to rise and look at the flying figure as it passed, when horse and rider appeared upon the slope not fifty feet above, and, in the impetus of descent, came straight upon him. He had just time to straighten into rigidity and mentally bury himself in the earth when a foam-flecked body shot over him in a mighty leap, and above it was the pale, scared face of a girl. They struck the shallow waters of the creek with a giant splash, the water flew high into the air a million diamonds, and the panting pony reeled and fell upon his knees on the opposite bank. With a strenuous tug of the rein and a backward sway of the body, the rider picked up her fallen carrier, then turned and looked at the young man lying pale, but smiling slightly. "Did I hurt you?" she asked, shortly. "What are you doin' lyin' around in the road? Seems to me you've got mighty little to do!"

"I wouldn't murder a man and then insult the corpse if I were you," said Horning; aggressively. "I'm not in the road; there's no road here; and I make a business of lying around."

The girl's large blue eyes looked at him curiously, and the rich color came back slowly to her white cheeks. She was clad in an impossible costume of blue calico and red bonnet. Her hands, brown and ungloved, rested lightly on the pommel of the saddle, which he now saw was the ordinary immense Texas affair, intended only for cow-hunting males. One stirrup had been removed, and the other, slightly long for her, dangled against her small, heavily-shod foot. She was young and robust, with clear skin and lovely mouth and teeth. Under her closely-fitting gown the muscles of her rounded arm showed firm, and she sat in her uncouth saddle with a skill acquired in early childhood. The red bonnet, a queerly-shaped affair, with splinters in it like a corset's, was blown back and hung flapping by a moist green ribbon. Her reddish hair

curled massively over a low, broad forehead, and it, too, was damp.

"What's your name?" she said.

"Charles Hornung," he answered quietly.

"I might 've known it. You're the man who runs the new-fangled ranch and thinks a greaser's better than a white man. You shore don't belong here."

"Admitted," said Hornung, cordially. "Where do you belong, and what's your name?"

"Melinda Rouse," she responded, seeing nothing strange in his manner or questions. "I b'long on this side the 'roya; you b'long on that. That's how we never crost before."

"Well," said Hornung, rising and looking about for his horse, which had nibbled its way to the summit of the ridge and showed outlined against the sky, "we'll cross again some time soon. I'm coming to see you. How far down the creek do you live, and how shall I find my way?"

"Mr. Hornung," said the girl, looking at him straight and soberly from under her

level brows, "don't you do it. You don't b'long down there; you're not wanted down there; and don't you come."

She wheeled her pony and clattered up the hill. Reaching the ridge she swayed slightly as she turned and looked down at him, standing silent and watching her ascent. The sharp line of land flashed up behind her and she was gone.

Hornung rode thoughtfully homeward. The mellowness had gone from the air and the sun was harsh and glaring. When the line riders came in at night, reeking and dusty, a few inquiries extracted all they knew of Melinda Rouse—which was little or nothing.

But on the subjects of "old man" Rouse, Jeff Rouse, his son, and José Arrivas, a "half-Mexikin, half-coyote," as they expressed him, who lived in the house and was supposed to be an accepted suitor, they were eloquent. "A d—d set of thieves and cut-throats," said Chick Haralson, himself a partially reformed cattle-lifter and speaking by the card. "Men who stole for a liv-

ing and murdered for fun. The terror of peaceable stock-raisers; the nightmares of officers; people who lived in the 'brush' because they could not live on the prairie; who checked the development of the country and kept decent men out of it; a God-forsaken set who ought to be run out of a country intended for white men. D—n 'em again!" And so said they all of them.

Here was an opportunity Hornung had wished; a chance to rub against a new phase of life in the Southwest; an invigorant warranted to neutralize any amount of ennui. He would ride down the creek in the morning.

Then Haralson turned to him and, in Melinda's words and with a look singularly like that she had worn, said "Don't!" His hearer was young and not to be scared of his purpose, albeit he had not an idea of what he should do when he got there. He laughed at Chick, and told him his head was thick with last week's Centralia whiskey, looked to his horse with unusual care

and went to bed filled with a feeling of pleasurable excitement.

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It was noontide, and the sun was hid behind a thick layer of cloud. The character of the country was changed, and instead of shining free and open in its green, was choked in a tremendous undergrowth of chaparral and cactus. Every growing thing had its thorn, with a sack of poison in the tiny point. The soil was dark and musty, for around the tangled roots it had lain for years and seen no sunlight. The horse plodded along with nose near knee, and no life in it. The warm saddle creaked with the movement and a strange, disagreeable smell rose from the leather and mingled with the dank odors of the undergrowth. The path, not more than fifteen inches wide, turned and twisted like a snake.

It made one abrupt curve around the end of an immense mesquite which had fallen near its edge, and Hornung, looking up, saw straight ahead a small cabin, with Melinda standing in the door. The rude roof

of water-grass was gray with many storms and blistering suns, and the interior behind the girl was an inky black. In the half-tone atmosphere she seemed a beautiful setting in a frame of ebony. He dismounted and approached her with deference, hat in hand.

"I told you I was coming," he said.

The girl returned his mild gaze steadily. Then her eyes shifted, and she glanced anxiously over the surrounding bushes as she picked nervously at her dress.

"I knew you would," she answered. "There was bad luck in your face an' bad luck in our crossin'. It was meant for me to do you harm, an' it's comin'."

"Say rather," said Hornung, "it was meant for me to do you good, and I have come."

"Go away!" she exclaimed, rapidly. "There's your horse! There's your road! Why did you come? For God's sake, go!"

To Hornung's face the blood was coming. It beat in his temples. His eyes were blazing, his lips quivered, and his throat was hot and dry. He saw only the pale face

before him. He seized the hand which hung loosely by her side, and bent until his mouth touched her cheek.

"Not unless you go with me!" he said, hoarsely.

She started as if struck, and looked at him white and bold. "I'm a poor girl, but honest. You don't mean me fair. I don't know your city ways. You are too good, an' not good enough for me. Leave before it's too late."

"You do me wrong!" said the man, passionately. "By God! You do me wrong! I love you! You rode over me—was it yesterday or a week ago? I will lie down and let you ride over me forever if you will come!"

She gazed at him a little space, then saying, "Wait for me!" turned into the hut. A moment later she reappeared bearing the bonnet. Under it Hornung thought he had never seen a woman look so coy and fair. She walked rapidly to a dense grove of small trees near the house and plunged into them. When he saw her again she was

mounted and coming toward him. With a smile of contentment he threw himself into the saddle. "You lead, I follow," he whispered.

With the word her fiery mustang reared straight in air, and with a bound was off, disdaining the path, speeding, as the crow flies, straight through the brush. Hornung saw the mighty leaps of her horse, saw her sway and turn under the overhanging branches, saw the upstretched fingers of the thorny shrubs catch at her skirt and tear it; felt the hot air strike his face like the blow from a whip, felt the delirium of the motion in every nerve; loved her power, her daring, her skill, her sacrifice for him; and for once in his life was happy. He did not think of his pedigree, of the traditions of his house, of his cultured kin, of his own future, of the suitability or unsuitability of his mate. The world held only the fleeing woman before him. It is possible, though, that stirring in him then and spurring him on was the blood of some border ancestor

who, in the long-dead centuries, had ridden such a ride with a stolen maiden.

The pace was telling, and the breathing of the brutes was short and loud. The girl rose in her saddle, and with a magnificent sweep of the arm pointed ahead through the interlocking branches to a faint streak of light that came through.

"The prairie!" she laughed back to him.

They stopped at the open, and while Hornung dismounted to tighten the girths on the trembling horses, she glanced shyly at him and then away.

"I'm comin' with you," she said shamefacedly, "because I like you, an' they say you're a good man. The life at home was too hard to bear: I heard nothin' all day but swearin' and keerd-playin'. I've got no mother. I know nothin' an', same time, I know heaps more'n they wanted me to. You won't be too hard on me, will you? I—I can't even write my name!"

Said Hornung, as he looked up at her and wiped the perspiration from his eyes: "I will make a woman of you."

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It was evening when the ranch was reached, and the line-riders, vaqueros and cooks crowded round in wonderment. The girl sat quiet with a pleased smile as one by one the men came awkwardly forward—in rustling leggings and with knees wide apart—to shake hands. She was smiling still when Hornung stood beside her and said:

“Boys, Miss Rouse is a brave woman. She is going to be my wife, and will boss us all. Chick, saddle two fresh horses. A preacher is wanted.”

THAT WAY MADNESS LIES.

Ridgville took its name from old man Ridgway. The old man got his name, he used to say, from his uncle. His father, who had been a drunken farmer in North Carolina years and years ago, he never mentioned. Ridgway's first names, it was commonly reported, were Absalom Benjamin. He was never known by any appellation other than "old Ab." He was 6 feet 3 inches high, and had long given up hunting for a horse that could carry him with comfort. He had lungs like a bellows, and a heart as big as a barrel. He had been a hard-working man in his youth, and in his age and idleness owned half the county. He had a hundred brands of cattle and horses. His wire fence measured 130 miles. It was twenty miles from his front gate to his house and four from his house to the back gate. He employed legions of Ameri-

can and Mexican line-riders and vaqueros. He was a voluble swearer, and exercised himself on them. He rose with the day and went to bed with the wild birds that occupied his principality of a pasture. He chewed, smoked and drank. He was 65 years old, and as strong as an ox. He was a millionaire twice over. He was fond of his heinous name, and had given it to everything he owned. The ranch was Abton. The creek which ran through it was Ab Creek. He had possibly a score of horses called Ab; his chief brand was a tremendous AB, and his only child and daughter he had blessed as Ablā. His wife died many years ago—pined, sickened and died of too much Ab.

The girl was a good girl enough, and a very pretty one. Having heard of her father's dollars all of her life, she carried her head high and stepped like a pampered filly. She had an imperious look out of large gray eyes, had seen so many peons lashed and, possibly, had lashed so many herself, that she seemed more than half inclined to lay

her heavy riding whip upon the shoulders of any man who failed to do her bidding. She had received the typical Texas education for women of her class—had attended public school taught in the little country town from the age of 8 to 14; then rested two years; then gone North for two years and returned: Eighteen years old, plump and domineering, with enough French to show that she hadn't any, a smattering of geography and history, no mathematics whatever, no needlework, but lots of crochet, a savage hand for the piano, an excellent taste in dress, a rattling tongue in her head, and—graduated.

In Ridgville she was envied, hated, caressed and a model. On Ab Creek she was an object of worship and the sibilant toast of the Mexic herders. To old Ab she was a revelation, an incarnation of the true, the beautiful and good. Aside from his excessive liberality and honesty, the ranchman's love for the girl was the best thing in him. He had seen her grow and expand day by day; had nourished her, cherished her,

played with her, spent money on her, taken her childish abuse with giant good nature and loved her with all of his rugged soul.

"My gal!" he would say; "Lord, God Almighty! there ain't no gal like my gal in forty states. Git right down an' come in. Just let her talk to you; let her play the pianner for you!" and the visitor would sit rapt while Abba thumped "Silvery Waves" from the new Steinway.

That was a queer community in Winn county. The elder half of it "had religion," and frowned on dancing with the frown of Zeus. The younger, which in its own time would also get religion, thought there was no aim in life but the "sasshay," no heaven but what they were pleased to term the "round waltz." There were not many of them—the country was thinly settled—but the few did duty for a million. Year in and year out, summer and winter, spring and fall, wet times and dry times, hard times and flush times, they danced. Were a couple married: dance. Were they divorced: dance. Was a child born: dance.

Did a child die: go to the funeral, discuss the weather, the last shooting, past dances, future dances, and the next night—dance.

Into such terpsichorean community was Abla inducted. She was strong, and had received the best of training from Mons. Guillaume, especially imported by the Smithville Ladies' Institute at tremendous salary, and with whom she had some tender passages. In her *escritoire*, among old pens and dusty flowers and locks of hair cut from the heads of callow students, was a note from the insane Frenchman imploring her to forsake her unrelenting parent and "take the wings with Guillaume, *ma charmante*." It was well for Abla that she had received rough tutelage in childhood. She was a level-headed girl, and, save for some fleeting memories of the pale Guillaume, who had a wife and six children in the little baker's shop in New York, came scathless from the heart combat. She found the Ridgville people hard to talk to, but harder to dance with. Her animal spirits carried her through the hauling quadrilles, but

she could not waltz with men who bobbed stiffly up and down, or revolved all night in a circle two or three yards in diameter.

So it happened that close on midnight, with her beautiful silk strained and torn, and an all-over feeling as if the prancing Ridgville youth had tramped on her instead of the floor, she put her head out of window and took a breath of fresh air. It was a moonlit night, and moonlight in Southern Texas means light. She could have read the small print of her morocco Testament, which she never read. The little town lay quiet along the sandy streets and the bare court-house plaza looked like a gigantic table-cloth spread for a feast of night spirits. There was a slow murmur in the air, and the oaks which grew along the little river quivered like silver.

"My dance, I think," said a voice behind her. She turned and saw a tall, straight young fellow, with long, open black eyes. He was clothed in the frontier evening dress—a clean shirt and other things—and looked at her with a stare of admiration

that was not in the least offensive, because he had no idea that it would prove so.

"Please excuse me, Jim," said the girl. "I am danced to a stand-still. The Ridgville folks are well-meaning but violent. My bones cry aloud for peace, peace, and there is no peace."

He sat down by her and looked at her, puzzled. He thought her very beautiful, but had never heard a girl talk of her bones before. He was debating whether a young woman who was so free in anatomy might not stand a little Western flirtation, such, for instance, as "You're mighty pretty," or "I never did see anybody look as sweet as you do," when she broke in with:

"You look astonished that I do not care to dance with you. Why should I? You can't dance. You only hop. You have no training. You can't talk. You are dressed like a mixture of butcher and Sunday clerk. You ought to go to school."

Forny had known Miss Ridgway from babyhood. He had played with her when

she was a skinny-legged chit, tearing her stockings in the chaparral. He had sat with her on the same bench under the village pedagogue. Once she had slapped him because he refused to deliver some sweetmeats which she coveted. As he looked at her, sitting fagged and handsome and supercilious, he could feel the sting of her fingers on his cheek.

"As to school," he said slowly and painfully, "I've been to school right here, an' you know it. What's more, I knew more them days than you did. But I ain't been North to learn how to spen' money for fine fixin's, an' come back and strut over ol' frien's."

He rose and moved away with hot blood in him, not turning to look back. His face was set and pale and his eyes dilated. She watched his broad back until he passed out of the doorway. A moment after she heard the clatter of hoofs and, glancing out, could see his black figure flying down the white and level road.

"An awful temper, that," she said. "I'll

never know these people again. Dad did wrong to send me away." She felt weary and chilled.

Her father leaned against the wall, his ponderous figure rolling slightly as he talked excitedly of the drouth to a knot of neighboring stockmen. His sombrero rested solidly on the back of his head, and a wide smile spread over his grizzled face as he saw his daughter. She stepped slowly to his side and calmly surveyed the men who gazed at her, silent and stolid: "I want to go home, Dad," she said as she laid her hand on his arm. "I do not suit these people, and they do not suit me."

Old Ab took her face between his two great hands, then stared at his companions in mystification. "You're clean broke down, Ably," he said, genially, "just trotted right off your hoofs. Let me tell Jose to bring 'round the horses. It's ten-mile to the ranch, an' I'll shake you up so's you'll be lively by the time we git there. Th' ol' man's not so good as he useter be, but he'll give you a spin just to wake you up, gal."

They clattered from the door, the girl sitting in the saddle true and straight. She had sped through the undergrowth many a time and oft, and lashed her horse in a frenzy of delight as the thorny limbs swept by her. She was a beautiful woman as she rode with head bent back and hands low in the white moonlight.

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Is there anything canine in a man that he should love the hand that beats him? Is there an occult principle that impels him to fawn and cringe for the word that hurts worse than a blow? Why should Forny woo the woman who had spoken him roughly? What was it that dragged him to her feet and held him there for her to spurn? He did not know. He was a plain man, young and, in his way, very strong. He was a hard rider and good shot, well liked, fair looking, tolerably off, of some influence among the people of his methods of life. But he was putty under the soft fingers of the 18-year-old girl, and he hated himself for it.

Sometimes he hated her, too. He had a fashion when they were riding together, which they did often, of dropping back and muttering to himself. She generally rode straight on with an amused smile, but sometimes turned round and goaded him to fresh madness. It never occurred to her free young spirit that she was treading upon thin-crustcd quicksands. She could have told you readily what Lancelot or Sir Galahad, Pelham or even Strathmore would have done in such and such situations, but of the possibilities of Jim Forny she knew nothing.

She thought herself really a superior woman, and, so far as personal beauty and a kind of reckless decisiveness may go, she certainly was. When she hammered her boarding-school airs from old Ab's piano and saw Forny sitting in delighted amaze, it never occurred to her that there were hidden chords and strange, sweet symphonies within the instrument that were not for her fingers. If she said something witty, but very cruel, to the unfortunate young fellow

and her hearty father threw back his mighty shoulders and roared, she would laugh with genuine enjoyment, taking no heed of the strained, pained face. And he loved her. She led him a dog's life, and he loved her like a dog.

The people of Winn county will long remember that Sunday morning of May, 1883. The spring branding was over. It had been a good winter. There was plenty of water, and the grass grew as if inspired. No disease blighted the herds, and the hearts of the honest cattle-folk were happy.

Old Ab stood in the door of his white frame house and slashed his boot with his whip. There was a frown on his face and he grumbled furiously under his breath. His horse, a powerful bluish animal, stood saddled, and a ragged Mexican held the bridle, industriously sucking a cigarette. Ab intended visiting some of his many camps, and Abba was going to church. He was waiting to kiss her good-bye, never troubling his unkempt head concerning her escort. He

took it for granted that Forny was the man. Between his daughter and the young stockman lay so wide a gulf of wealth, education, breeding, everything that went to make a difference in his eyes, that a marital union between the two was unworthy of serious thought. That Forny did not coincide with him was evident. The young man rode up as the elder leaned heavily in the doorway and civilly doffed his wide hat, saying something concerning the state of the range and bashfully dismounting at Ridgway's surly invitation to come in.

"I'm goin' to church," he remarked, deferentially, "an' Ably's goin' too. Is she ready?"

"Ready? H—I, no!" said the father. "Never was ready in her life. When we uns stan's hyar tell we grows to the floor, she'll come skippin' 'long an' pull us up—mebbe!"

Forny sat down resignedly and waited. His face was pale, and bore a certain look of determination. He had been talking to himself as usual, and had sternly avowed his

purpose to put it to the touch that very day. "There ain't no reason for her to say no," he muttered, "but, d—n it! there ain't no reason in her. Here'm I, healthy an' good-natured an' willin'—a better man by a infernal sight than old Ab were at my age—an' I'm goin' to ask her. Ef she says no, I'll—" and here he had broken off and refused to entertain the possibility of her "No." He heard a voice lilting overhead and a light foot pattering down the stairs. She was singing the tearful grind, "Silver Threads Among the Gold," and as she saw Forny sitting on the steps she stopped in the door and with a musical laugh said: "Oh, my darling, you will be'—left."

"Always am," grunted her adorer, staring moodily at the red tops of the tall boots that adorned his legs. "Any one that wastes his time foolin' roun' you, Ably, is liable to git lef'—an' stay lef'," he added.

"Been a-waitin' an' stompin' an' chawin' my bit fur two hours," said old Ab. "Why'n name o' sense, gal, don't yer dress like yer mammy useter? When th' ol'

woman got ready to go anywheres she tuk'n dashed some water on her face, an' she were off."

"Because," responded the daughter, "the girls at school wore something besides cold water."

Those girls at school were unknown, but awing quantities to the old man and Forny. They were brought forward on all occasions and simpered and giggled them into utter submission. Ab kissed his daughter hurriedly, looked humbly at Forny and rode away. The latter had sprung from the steps all awkwardness and delight, and stood ready to assist his mistress to the saddle. She placed one tiny foot in the hollow of his broad palm and with a bound was off and away, leaving him to follow.

The very incarnation of cross purpose was in her. When he caught her after a lengthened chase, she would not ride with him. If he walked, she cantered; if he cantered, she walked. She was first on one side of the road and then on the other, riding at full speed ahead and flicking with her whip

at the hanging leaves, coming behind him with a wild rush, giving him enough to do to sit his half-tamed horse. It seemed to him that she saw his purpose and was determined to balk it.

It maddened him. The sun was hot, and its heat added to the fever in his veins. When he fumed till the sweat hung in drops, on his brow and he gored his horse savagely with the spur, she laughed at and left him; when he gave up all hope of speaking to her again, she returned to goad him, rally him on his ill humor, suggest improvements in his rough but picturesque dress, point out his inaccuracies of speech and faults of carriage, quote "our girls" to him until in his heart he cursed them and her and heaven.

When they reached the little log hut called by courtesy "Siloam Church," she was full fifty yards in advance, while he was plodding along quietly and wearily. She sprang lightly to the ground and entered alone. The people were used to the vagaries of the rich stockman's daughter,

and knew all about the hard lines of Forny's semi-courtship. Their grinning faces only affected him dully as he stumbled half blindly into the crowded room. He saw his sweetheart far to the front among a bevy of rustic belles, and knew that she had taken her position to bar his presence. He looked around and spying a vacant bench to the rear unconsciously took a seat on it. His hat lay unheeded on the floor as he sat still with head bowed on his breast. The drone of the congregation fell monotonously on his ear and through the single window sweet summer scents floated in. He recognized even then the exquisite odor of the huisache blanca blossom, and lifted his face to drink it in. In the dim light the old white-haired preacher rose and laboriously lined out "Near the Cross." The choral voices rose and Abba's notes soared sweet and strong high over them all. She sang as smoothly as though no tortured man sat near her, done almost to death by her wantonness. There was mockery in the sacred words which came so glibly from her

lips: "Love and mercy found me." There was no mercy in her heart; why should she speak it? A ray of sunlight came through a crack in the roof and fluttered boldly upon her brown hair. He could see the tresses turn to gold under its touch and mark the clear blood in her cheek. She was a physical model of a woman; he a poor plain man, with nothing to recommend him save ability to long and suffer. She was far out of his reach, he thought.

But might not some other man pluck the ripened peach? With the thought, the blood surged to his cheek and he threw his head up like a startled tiger. He had not noted the flight of time, and the people were rising to go. They came trooping down the narrow space between the benches, stopping in knots and clusters to discuss the sermon and the news of the week. Abba was more dilatory than any. She had a word for every one, and was intimate with none. Once Forny saw her give her hand to a young clerk in one of the two stores that Ridgville boasted. The

boy, he was little more, held her ungloved hand unnecessarily long, the lover thought, and his brain throbbed to bursting. Then a great calm came over him, and he knew that something had been born in him that he could no more control than he could direct the winds. He waited for the girl quietly, and only half-smiled as she looked at him closely to gauge the extent of his suffering. She saw something in his wan, dark face—she could not have told what—that sobered her—she could not have told why. They mounted the horses prosaically enough, and went down the road silently together. The people stood watching them. The heat came down in shafts, and on the wide fields was an immense light. Three hundred yards from the church they entered the woods that stood solid and dark. The trees seemed to close behind them as a wall.

When the sun was low, old Ab found them. Forny had fallen across her body, with his face in the sand. When they raised him up, the white glistening particles clung

to his curly hair like diamond dust. Pinned to the bosom of her dress was a note in his labored hand. She had been to school, it said, and was too good for him. No other man should have her; so he had shot her.

"Tell old Ab," so the note ran, "I hated to do it. She was not a good girl, but she was his to the last. I did not even kiss her after she was dead."

TRISTAM AND ISEULT.

James Marolle was one of those unfortunate men whom everybody likes. He had also a powerful enemy in the shape of himself. He was a Westerner, and consequently free-hearted and free-spoken. It was never charged that he had one wife in Natchez-under-the-Hill and another one up in Pike, but events proved that he was not any too good to have had them. He was a large, fleshy young fellow, with an oiled tongue and fresh-colored face. He had a way of swinging back when he walked and standing with legs far apart when he talked, which gave the idea that he was a man of wealth and influence.

He came to Texas in 1881, and moved in on Jim Ned creek. He announced that he had come to stay, and as he seemed able and willing to pay his way, everybody was glad to see him. He bought a ranch and

went in for improved stock, with a priceless bull and unlimited confidence. His range and intentions were good; his experience slight. As he was willing to drink, always anxious to pay for it, always in the best of humors, seemingly at peace with himself and the world—as it was locally and frequently expressed, “always just the same,” every one wished him well.

Each man has his weakness, and Marolle's was heinous. Society on the Jim Ned was limited in its scope and its needs, and he loved the women. Not many of them were in the country at that time, and what few there were commanded a premium. Three of the girls were able to play the piano, when they could find one, and they made the most of the accomplishment. Another weakly tinkled a cracked guitar, swung to her neck by a blue ribbon and warbled the “Yellow Rose of Texas.” Probably Marolle had been used to better things, but he did not show it. He went ahead, pottered at his fancy breeding, attended the neighborhood dances, drank whisky in

Jonesboro, and altogether had an unlimited bank account with the future upon which he drew liberally.

Once in December, 1882, when it was bitter cold and the cattle were dropping by hundreds on the ranges, old man Erath, who lived on the Espia and was blessed with the piano-playing girls, consented to give a dance. It was to be very swell, and two Mexican riders notified the countryside ten days in advance. In an emergency Jones county could turn out a fair crowd of suffragans, and everybody intended to be there. Erath's one-story house squatted in the middle of the prairie, like a duck on a pond, and in the summer time was a fair place enough, surrounded by miles of waving grass and cooled by purest breezes, but when the norther howled down and the black earth lay hard under the hoof-beats, it was neither beautiful nor comfortable.

Visitors dismounted, and trusting their horses to seek the southern side of the house and stay there, entered. The long room was filled. A fire blazed under the

mud chimney at one end, and near it sat the solitary fiddler, already half-seas over. The women, fallow and pinched-looking for the most part, ranged along one wall, squirming uneasily on the hard-bottom chairs, and patting their feet impatiently while the orchestra mended one of his strings. Nearly all were married, and their life-mates clustered on the opposite side, chewing and spitting and talking capital and cattle. Marolle was there, too—on the women's side—talking to black-eyed Mrs. Wilgot, a smooth-faced little woman, handsome and with a bold look.

The dancing was only the old-fashioned quadrille. In those days the lascivious waltz would have been suppressed. The band, in addition to furnishing the music, called the figures, acted as master of ceremonies, and, dropping his bow on occasion, drank with any one who would ask him. Marolle had out Mrs. Wilgot, and when the set was over sat by her. He had her out again, and sat by her. The husband was there, an ugly man enough. He was morose and a

drinker, very poor and very little liked in Jones county—quiet, unassuming, unsocial and dangerous. He took things coolly enough, however, and, beyond scowling at Marolle once or twice, said and did nothing. There was a pile of arms in one corner, deposited by the guests who considered it a matter of honor to divest themselves of weapons immediately upon entering. Wilgot had been standing with his back to the wall and edging along it all night. He had approached within a dozen feet of the rifles and had a dogged look on his face when daylight came in at the window and the dance broke up. Marolle took Mrs. Wilgot to her horse and helped her to the saddle, holding her foot long in doing so. Wilgot turned and looked at him as they rode away.

A week afterward Marolle bought a buggy and slashing team of gray horses. It was a new thing to the Tom Neddites and excited merriment. Those people regarded the purchase as a mixture of effeminacy and dandyism. Marolle merely

said, with one of his amused chuckles, that he had got it with a purpose and intended to use it. He could be seen frequently driving along the hard prairie roads in the cold nights, with his cigar alight and always in the neighborhood of Wilgot's little ranch. People began to talk, but Marolle was a light-hearted fellow with a ready smile and word. The women would not blame him, while the men shook their tousled heads. Mrs. Wilgot came to town in the springtime and imprudently spent a good deal of money. She dressed very well indeed, and now that she had opportunity, proved herself a woman of taste, looking younger and handsomer than the people had ever seen her. She was unmercifully discussed at the camp-meetings, at church on Sundays, and at the singing-school on Wednesday nights, but as yet there had been no esclandre, and the women met and kissed her as usual.

When the summer came and the spring branding was over and Marolle had pronounced his year's breeding operations a success, the young clerks and lawyers who

formed the eligible population of Jonesboro concocted a "fish-fry," to take place on the banks of the Jim Ned, five miles below town. Preparation for the occasion brought out a kind of rivalry between the city and country belles. For two weeks the little stores of the place were filled with shoppers doing their best to fit themselves out, regardless of their hard-working, hard-riding fathers and husbands. Mrs. Wilgot was in the thick of it, buying everything that woman could possibly need, laughing affably, and desperately bent on eclipsing the county. Marolle followed her about in a big tamed-animal fashion, carrying her bundles and waving away any male assistance whatsoever. Wilgot staid at home, mended his saddle, rode after the steers and waited on his two small children.

Two days before the piscatorial festivities, Mrs. Wilgot informed female acquaintances—friends she had none—that her husband had rheumatism, and would not attend.

"You won't miss him," hazarded one.

"Oh, yes I shall," said the charming young frontier wife. "But for Mr. Marolle's kindness in offering to drive me over, I don't know what I should have done."

She came when the crowd was assembled—Marolle with her, of course. It was learned that he had driven to the ranch, and the woman had taken her seat by him without a word to her husband or children. Wilgot said nothing. As for Marolle, he never considered it necessary to apologize to anybody. He did not ask such things himself; why should others expect it of him? And yet he might, in his light, good nature, have stopped to think of the home he was ruining. In the common prudence of a sane man, he might have stopped to think how it was all going to end. But Marolle seldom thought of anything beyond the moment.

He and his companion drove up to the grounds with a rush and clatter. He was holding his elbows squarely, had a silver-mounted whip in his left hand—he was a left-handed man—and the fancy team was

smoking. He threw down the reins and sprang from his buggy, carefully assisting Mrs. Wilgot to alight. They wandered off shortly with rod and line, and were seen no more till dusk, when they came up just in time to see the last dance in the woods. The woman looked pale and flurried, and her hand trembled as she raised a dipper of water to her lips.

It was a cool, pleasant night. The trees stood around them like giant sentinels in the gloom, their mossy beards swinging in the slow evening wind. The laughter had ceased and the girls were moving silently about searching for wraps and lost escorts. The horses in the shadows were black and shapeless forms, and the clink of stirrup against stirrup sounded as they shifted restlessly. The cicadas iterated monotonously, and an owl flapped among the branches and steered his way with a certain and sweeping motion. The running waters of the creek had an elfish undertone in the still dimness, the weeds on the bank stood drooping and pensive, and the rays of the

fast-rising moon cast queer lengths and shadows among the swaying limbs. There was a sense of isolation on the party as they stood silenced before the start.

"Time to be off," said Leggett. "Let me swing you up, Miss Mollie."

Marolle had driven up, and with Mrs. Wilgot he rolled away slowly. The spell was broken. The people mounted and moved all together, chattering and laughing loudly.

Suddenly, fifty yards in advance, just around the bend in the road where the tall cottonwood cast a solid black shadow across it as it lay white and glistening before them, two heavy reports boomed out, and a second later a shorter and sharper one. They heard the team plunge with a shrill neigh, and a crash as the buggy struck the trees and shattered. Then came the long roll of hoofs down the road, and stillness. The young men and women in a gallop pressed for the bend that hid a tragedy. There were two—three—dark

objects lying in the pale sand. They turned them over and looked at the still faces.

And no man said a word, for they had all expected it, and the girls and women sobbed hysterically, and one of them stepped forward and shudderingly pulled down the hem of a dress which had been raised in the fall. They were quite dead—the seducer, the female fool, the suicide.

Marolle had been killed instantly. His face had a half-merry, half-pleading look, and his left hand held a piece of purple ribbon. The woman's features were distorted by fright, pain, horror, what not? They were very dreadful to look upon. Across her breast, covered by its newly-purchased silk, lay a splinter from the riven vehicle. Wilgot was straightened out composedly like a man who had done his work well and was satisfied. He lay on his shotgun, the weapon of murder; a small pistol, the weapon of suicide, was near him. He was clad roughly, the stockman's wide hat still resting upon his grizzled head, but lying dead in the moonlight he had a name-

less dignity that was not his in life. Perhaps his wrongs, that had been the death of him, had made a man of him.

His little children were asleep when the ranch was reached. They waked and asked for their father; for their mother they had no word.

TOLD BY THE DEPUTY SHERIFF.

The night was very dark, and the cracks in the little cabin, through which a cat might have been thrown without touching a hair, gave free ingress and egress to that nastiest of Texan products, a norther. Through the rifts in the roof the stars blinked cheerily, and occasionally light clouds drifted by them, like flakes of wool hurled over the house top. There was a big blaze in the mud-daubed fireplace and the flames flared in the swirling draughts. Three tin cups and a plug of tobacco rested on the pine table; a beneficent jug, with a corn cob stopper stood stoutly on the hearth; the three clay pipes alight showed redly in the half dark.

The Deputy Sheriff sat with his chair tilted against the wall and his knees tucked under his chin. He was a small dark young fellow, with black bright eyes and

a loosely hung jaw. His pipe was held stiffly in one hand and treated with the respect due to a solace, but his other hand waved solemnly up and down or flickered excitedly as he told his tale. No one had offered him any inducement to do so, but he had been silent perforce while Robinson gave us a song and it worried him.

"When I was in Jeff Davis county," he prefaced in his quick eager way, "I worked for as game a man and good a Sheriff as the State can show. I got a fair whack on the office and I made lots of money. I rode with the girls and I attended meeting regular. I was looked on as a exemplary young feller, and when the quarterly baptizin's come round the sisters all looked to see me ducked. I got away from the sky pilots by the skin of my teeth. If I had staid there they would have foreclosed a mortgage on my young soul, but I moved out. I don't mind sayin' I had to.

"It was a Sunday evenin' and I had gone up to the arbor that did duty for a church with my very best girl. There was a pro-

tracted meetin' goin' on and had been for a week. There was a high state of religious excitement in the town, and it was as much as a man's life was worth to say 'durn' out loud. My boss was on the front bench with a holiness smile on his face and two guns in his pants. We took a back seat, me and my girl did, for we did not want to catch the preacher's eye and call down buckets of damnation on our heads. They lined out 'The Dyin' Thief Rejoiced to See,' and we sailed in, me and my girl did. I saw a young feller ride up to the arbor and hitch. He straddled up to the Sheriff with his legs wide open and wet with sweat. He went down into his shirt, reached out a long piece of paper and give it to the Sheriff. The boss got up, looked around at me and started out to the office. I followed him straight. When we got there he turned to me, my boss did, and he says:

"'You get two men and go up on Pendencia creek and get that John Chisolm and bring him down here and lock him up. I've got a warrant here for his arrest for

murder committed more'n five year ago, and you hustle.'

"Chisolm was a mighty bad man. He was a thief by nature and a murderer from habit. I asked him once what made him kill so many men and he said he liked to change ghosts. He was a slashin' six-foot feller with big blue eyes and yellow hair. He was a able rider and knew the brush better'n anybody. He was knowed to be a shootist and there weren't nobody hanker-in' for the job of bringin' him in.

"It was 3 o'clock in the evenin' and time was gettin' short. Chisolm lived fifteen miles west of town, straight across the prairie, 'bout a mile and a half to the left of the old Stockton trail. I tackled one man and tackled another and they was all busy. I got mad and had just made up my mind to go up to the Pendencia and shoot Chisolm and say he tried to get away, when Blaze Hooper allowed he was willin' to ride and was lookin' for fun, and we loped out of town together. We went by the arbor and I glanced at Paulina Gibbs and got

ready to smile. I see Jeems Wilson settin' by her and yowlin' from the same book and I dug my spurs into old Paint till he bel-lered.

"We fetched Chisolm's house just a little before sundown. The ol' man and ol' woman was at home, but John weren't no-where around. I asked for him and his mother says as how he were off runnin' cattle and wouldn't be back for a week. I felt a mind to tell her she was assault and batterin' the truth when I heard hoofs down the road and Chisolm come trottin' 'round the bend. When he see me he kinder straightened up in his saddle and his arm dropped toward the Winchester swung to his pommel. He were a handy man. He come along, however, and when he rid up I showed him the warrant and Blaze sidled up with his six-shooter, and we had him.

" 'Look ahere,' says he, 'you folks down to the Court House has been tryin' to lay me out, and I ain't goin' to trust myself 'mongst no such lot less'n I carry my friends here,' and he patted his weapons.

"I told him as how pris'ners weren't generally allowed to carry arms. 'Howsomever, John,' says I, 'I don't think you want'er shoot me, and if you smell anything dead up the creek, you're welcome to your guns.'

"John he turned and give the ol' man some directions 'bout what he wanted done with stock. His ol' mother come runnin' out and caught hold of his leg and patted it, but he kinder jerked it loose and we rode off. The last I see of that ol' woman she were standin' in the middle of the road, shadin' her eyes with her hand and lookin' after us. Two or three chickens was peckin' round and a lazy good-for-nothin' ranch dog begun barkin' and cavortin' 'bout the door.

"That Pendencia is a pretty big settlement and they was all rustlers. We had to pass through the middle of it and Chisolm stopped at first at one house and then at another and whispered to the men inside. I didn't half like the looks of it. It was gettin' late and I lit out into a hard ride. We went down the big plain road, Chisolm

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on my left and Hooper 'bout ten paces in front. We was all ridin' pretty good horses. When we had put some five mile behind us Chisolm sorter plucked up spirits and we begin to sing and swap lies.

"I noticed that he was kinder nervous and kept squintin' ahead of him and at the bushes on each side of the road, but I didn't let it bother me any. We went straight ahead and when we reached Pena creek five mile from town we stopped and give our horses a restin' spell. When they had drunk enough we started on. As we reached the top of the divide and headed down the long slope Chisolm sung out, 'Now make 'em pick up four feet where they put down two,' and we went clatterin' down the grade. The road on each hand was lined so thick with mesquite that it worried the rabbits to squeeze through it. The cactus grew tall and rank among it, reaching half way to its top. It was a cloudy night, no moon, and a heavy wind was blowin' square in our faces.

" 'I'm hungry,' says Chisolm.

“ ‘All right,’ says I, ‘when we get to town we’ll go to Burr’s store and get some cove oysters, pepper-vinegar and crackers.’ They ain’t bad to take.

“ ‘Leanin’ over in his saddle, Chisolm turned to me and says he: ‘You know that I’ve been what they call a bad man. I’ve killed, and as for cattle stealin’ I’ve seen things knocked, but I never did half of what was laid to me. Every hoof and horn missed in this country was charged to me.’

“ ‘I know it,’ says I. ‘You ain’t half as bad a man as people say; not half as bad as you’d like to make out.’

“ ‘Somehow there was a queer feelin’ come over me. I didn’t know what it was, but I turned and looked at Chisolm. We was within three miles of town and had settled down to a jogtrot. He was leanin’ forward in his saddle with his hands in front of him, lookin’ down at ’em. Blaze was moseyin’ along in front, one leg crossed over his pommel and singin’ under his breath. It was a sandy road, the hoofs made no noise and the words come back to me:

Amazin' Grace! How sweet th' soun'
Thet saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now I'm foun',
Was boun' but now I'm free.

"The wind come in our faces a-zip-zip-pin' and the tough mesquite bent and sung under its stroke.

" 'Halt! D——n you, hold up there!'

"I looked behind and the road were full of men and tramplin' horses. Men think quick in them kind of places. I didn't know whether they was friends of Chisolm's come to rescue him, or people bent on killin' him. I was willin' to give him a dog's show and I wheeled my horse acrost the road, intendin' to let 'em ride over me and give him a chance to get clear. They had broad hats on, and handkerchiefs tied over their faces with holes cut in 'em to see through.

"Chisolm did not try to run. He stopped his horse just as I did. I don't think his hand ever got to his gun. He just had no time to do nothin'. The head man on a big white horse passed me at full speed and

as he jerked him to his haunches threw his pistol down on Chisolm at three feet distance and pulled the trigger. John had turned to yell at him and the bullet struck him fair in the mouth. It passed through and broke his neck at the base of the skull. He went back sideways from his saddle, a dead man. I had jerked my horse to the side of the road and they trampled round him firin' down at him. It went through me to see 'em butcherin' a poor harmless corpse and I hollered at 'em. With a rush a whole gang made for me. Jesus how ol' Paint hummed along! I went down the side of the road twenty yards in advance, maybe, and them firin' at me every jump. The prickly pears flew right and left, struck by the flyin' hoofs of my horse. They give it up in about three hundred yards and I circled through the brush and went down to town.

"Blaze had lit out when the murder begun and when I got there the town was crazy. He rushed down to the arbor where the night meetin' was goin' on and

yelled that Chisolm and me was both killed. When he last see me, says Blaze, I was surrounded by a wall of fire, but doin' my best. The Sheriff jumped up and summoned a posse. The women and girls screamed and half of 'em fainted and fell under the benches. Paulina's mother got down on her knees and prayed the Lord to be good to my sinful soul. Paulina she shook that lopsided beau of hers and talked about goin' down to the stores the first thing in the mornin' and buyin' mournin'.

"We got a waggin and about one hundred of us went out after Chisolm's body. We found him lyin' stiff acrost the road. He were a sight to see. He had been killed so dead and went so clear of the saddle that his big white hat never fell off. He was lyin' there with it on the back of his head, just as he used to wear it, his blue eyes wide open and starin' at the stars where his soul by that time was wanderin' around. He had been shot all to pieces. A inventory of his wounds would have made a book. We took him to town and sat up with him

that night, and when the jury started in on him next day they put in three hours of awful good time and never did get the holes straightened out.

"We started a messenger in the mornin' to tell his folks that he were dead, but they knowed it when the man got there. His horse come up to his ranch a little after daylight with the gun still in the saddle scabbard.

"Along about 11 o'clock there come ridin' into town a procession of Pendencia residents headed by Chisolm's father and mother. They druv up to the jacal where the body was layin' and the ol' lady hopped from the waggin and rushed in. Then there come from her withered breast such a wail as I never heard before. She threw herself on the corpse that lay long and straight before her, and cried:

" 'Oh, John! John! Are you gone? Will I never hear your sweet voice no more? The little boy I raised, that hung to my breast, that could ride and rope so good when he were just a little fellow! Oh, Je-

sus, he's gone! They murdered him! They killed my boy! You killed my boy! You did it!

"In her madness she shook her skinny fingers in my face. To this day that ol' woman and man and the whole Pendencia tribe believe that I murdered John while ridin' by his side; that I went up there with a bogus warrant, arrested him, took him down the road and shot two or three hundred holes in him. They accused Blaze Hooper of bein' my accomplice—him that melted from sight like a free lunch before a tramp printer. He's livin' there yet, I believe, but owin' to the dislike the Pendencia people had for me I took up my bed and skipped. When they planted Chisolm in the little cemetery that contained 105 graves, and only three of the occupants had died a natural death, they put him into a hole within two feet of a young man he had shot two or three years before. I recollect that when they got the proper distance down the crumblin' edge of a coffin was exposed.

“Kick that jug over this way. I’m goin’ to drink to the memory of the Chisolm coroner’s jury. There was six of ’em—every one of ’em a good horse-sense man. This was their verdict:

“ ‘Come to his death from too many of other folks’ cattle and about forty Winchester in the hands of participants unknown to us, the jury.’ ”

THE PAINT HORSE OF SEVEN COLORS.

This is all about the Paint Horse of Seven Colors. That is, it is all I know about him. I tell the tale as it was told to me by Juan Gregorio Trinidad Antonio Jesus Maria Pablo Jacobo Garza, Alcalde of the village of Santa Maria de los Dolores and Captain of the Sheep Shearers, down by the Rio Grande.

It was a night late in September. A soft wind crooned over leagues of chaparral. Giant cacti reared misshapen forms in the darkness. Overhead the sky was blue black and studded with blazing stars. Near by was the sheep pen, built of crooked logs and crowded with sheep waiting for the morrow's clipping. A fire built of mesquite branches flickered lightly and the pungent smell of its smoke was on the air. A huge pot of coffee simmered on the coals.

The tortillas and "cabritas"—goat's flesh stewed with red pepper—had been eaten and the tin dishes thrown into a box for the night. Juan Gregorio and all the rest of it was squatted near the fire, for the Texan nights at this time of year are chill. Between his brown fingers he held a cigarette of black tobacco rolled in a corn-shuck. Near him were a dozen companions, all squatted, all smoking, all intently listening. The Mexicans of the lower classes are rich in folk-lore and this is the time when they tell their stories. All of the shearers had heard the tale many times, but they were eager to hear it again. Repetition does not weary a Mexican.

"The horse," said Juan Gregorio, "was black, white, bay, gray, sorrel, roan and blue. He was a stallion and as tall as a tall man. I do not know where he was born. No man knows that. I think it was somewhere in the Santa Rosa mountains. When he was a young horse he came down to the plains. That was long ago—so long ago,"

and Juan Gregorio held his hands wide apart to indicate great distance.

"He was very beautiful and swift—oh, so swift! He devoured the distances. There was never another horse like him. His tail, which was black, swept the ground. His mane was white as snow and it fell nearly to his knees. He could trot faster than a common horse can run and he ran almost as fast as the blue quail flies. Early in the morning he would get his breakfast of sweet mesquite grass on the Arroya Pena and at noon time he would shade himself beneath the pecan trees that grow along the Nueces river. That is 150 miles," said Juan Gregorio, gravely.

"Si!" said all of his companions.

"El Caballo Pinto de los Siete Colores," the tale-teller went on, "had no herd. He lived by himself. Not any of the other horses could keep up with him, you see. When he traveled he went like the wind. He was first with one group of mares and then with another, but he did not stay with any of them long. He was very brave and

when he first came down from the mountains he whipped all of the stallions of the plains. He slew the large black stallion that headed the herd near Espentosa lake and the bay and the gray stallions that were kings of the horse country south of the Sabinal canyon. His fame went among the mustangs all through old Mexico and New Mexico and about the headwaters of the Pecos. The ranges were his from the Rio Grande forks to the salt marshes above Matamoras. He was generous and when he had defeated a stallion he gave him back his mares. They all owned him as master, and when the roll of his hoofs was heard coming down the wind, and afar off they saw him a rushing speck upon the prairie, the mares and colts herded together to welcome him and the stallion that led them went in amongst them humble as they. The eyes of the Paint Horse seemed to flash fire. His mane tossed about him in waves of silvery hair. His black tail floated on the wind like a banner. He carried his head high and his ears pointed forward.

His ears were bright bay. Ai! he was beautiful!

"Because the Paint Horse would not stay long with a herd and because he was swift like the wind, no one could catch him. Many tried, but always his shrill neigh rang out and he flashed away over the level prairie like a meteor. No man could lasso him, and if he had been lassoed no man could have held him. He would not walk into the traps that were dug for him near the water holes. His red nostrils scented all scents upon the breeze and no one could approach him to shoot him through the upper part of his massive neck and stun him. All hunters knew his trail, for his hoofs were smaller than those of a pony and his stride was a yard longer than that of the tallest stallion. Many followed the trail, but always they saw the Paint Horse upon an eminence watching them. Always he tossed his small head in air and neighed defiance and was away with a mighty bound, higher and farther and more graceful than the bound of the antelope.

"Of all the hunters who hunted the Paint Horse none so longed for him as Juan Castro longed. Juan Castro was a brigand who had been driven from his home ranch by the rich Spaniards. He fought them and robbed them. Some of the money he took from them he gave to his men, some he gave to the church and some he gave to the poor. Juan Castro swore that he would be a homeless man until the Spaniards were driven from Mexico. When, his face hidden by his serape, he went to early mass in the villages, he always renewed his vow to fight for his country until the Lord took his soul into His own keeping. The good fathers knew and loved Juan Castro and they gave him absolution for the Spaniards he killed. Once he was captured in a strong fight near Lerdo. They put him in prison and were to shoot him when the day broke. He dug his way through the adobe walls of the jail with a small dagger he had hidden in his hair, for his hair was long like a woman's. He longed for the Paint Horse because he knew that once on the back of

that mighty steed he would be safe from all his foes.

"This is the way that Juan Castro caught the King of the Mustang Herds: He owned a beautiful mare and he called her Bonita. She was all of an iron gray and her skin shone like satin. She would eat sugar from his hand and come when he called. At night she would lie upon the prairie while he pillowed his head upon her neck. If danger drew near she would awake him and stand ready to fly with him. He loved her next to Juanita Garcia, who was a Spanish girl, the daughter of a great Don whose cattle roamed in the hills near Saltillo. The Spanish girl loved him, but it was by her kindred that he was taken and condemned to die:

"One time Juan Castro mounted his horse and led Bonita by a halter. He took her to the rolling prairie near Valenzuela and hid himself near by, deep in a hollow that was overgrown with huisache. By and by he heard the roll of the Paint Horse's hoofs and he appeared upon a

ridge, coming like the wind. He saw the sheen of Bonita's coat gleaming in the sun and galloped gayly to her. He had never seen so beautiful a mare. He did not know that his mighty heart was near to its undoing, that the days of his freedom and power were close to their end, but it was so. Juan Castro lay hidden all of the day while the Paint Horse played near Bonita and told her in a thousand ways that he loved her. The mare of iron gray permitted him to rub his soft muzzle along her neck and leaned her head against his deep side. The Paint Horse wooed her as in all his fiery life he had not wooed.

"Then Castro rose and called Bonita to him. She came gladly. The Paint Horse wheeled with a snort of terror and bounded away. He flashed like the light across the prairie, but a half-mile away paused and looked back. Bonita was slowly following her master. Short was his struggle."

At this point Juan Gregorio stopped and proceeded slowly to roll another cigarette. His audience stared at him hungrily. He

selected carefully a corn-shuck of proper thinness and meditatively dropped tobacco into it. His usually deft fingers seemed clumsy and he was a long time in getting it to his liking. Raising a burning branch he touched it to the end of his cigarette, inhaled a deep breath of the smoke, expelled it slowly, looked around him with conscious power and resumed:

"Love conquered the wild horse that not skill nor brute force nor swiftness had been able to conquer. He followed Castro and the mare. He swept around them in wide circles. Sometimes he darted away like a frightened bird, but always he returned. When Castro reached his camp the Paint Horse was following closely behind. He stood within the outer circle of the firelight and watched the mare who was tethered to a tree. Then he came close up and allowed Castro to put his hand upon him. It was the first time that the fingers of man had touched his glossy coat and a shiver ran through him when he felt it. It was long before he yielded completely to dominion.

There was war when his master first endeavored to put the bit between his teeth. He did not like the taste of the hard steel which hurt his mouth. Always Castro was kind. More than once he broke away and went to the prairie, but always he returned for love of Bonita. If he became violent, Castro had only to take the mare to another camp and hide her, when the great horse would sicken with sorrow. He learned that when he was tractable he was rewarded by Bonita's company. When his old lawless spirit got the better of him he was punished by her absence. There could be no punishment like that to the Paint Horse of Seven Colors. In time he learned to love his master for himself. He was friend, servant and watch dog. When the Paint Horse was with him no foeman could approach the sleeping brigand. He could smell a man at the distance of half a mile. He could hear a footfall upon the soft grass a hundred yards away. When he slept in the night the rustle of a twig would awake him. With the brigand upon his back he

would cover three hundred miles in the course of a day. His walk, trot and gallop were all as easy as a rocking chair. He did not know fatigue. He would go for twenty-four hours without water and, if necessity pressed, three days without stopping for food. The Spanish began to look upon Castro as a demon. He was seen at places leagues apart on the same morning. In combat he was swift to strike and swifter to flee. With his men he captured and robbed a Spanish trade train near Torreon and on the evening of that day single-handed fought and slew the captain of the garrison at Monterey, two hundred miles away. The thunder of the hoofs of the Paint Horse became as much of a terror to the Spanish soldiery as formerly they had been an incentive to his pursuers. Castro laughed and was happy and the great stallion was happy in Bonita's love."

Juan Gregorio here paused and took out his corn-shucks for another cigarette, but his hearers knew what was coming and whispered impatiently, "Andele! Andele!"

which is Mexican for "Hurry! Hurry!" so he resumed:

"One night Juan Castro, mounted on the Paint Horse and leading Bonita, climbed the steep and rocky pathway which led to the hacienda of Don Manuel Garcia. Juanita, her reboso wound about her head, waited for him near the great corral. The night was moonless, but the stars were shining clearly. The girl could see the forms of her lover and his horses as they came up the hillside. Her father and his men were drinking in the long low dining room of the house, only a few yards away. Her heart beat fast. Castro reached her, swung himself clear of the great stallion and lifted her to the saddle upon Bonita's back. At that moment one of the retainers came to the door for a breath of air. He was drunk, but not too drunk to see.

"'Ai!' he called. 'Hola! Hola! Hola! Hola! The donna and a lover! Ai!'

"Fifty men sprang from the table and rushed to the door. Castro at a bound leaped upon his giant steed and headed him

down the path. Bonita swung in behind him and they were off at racing speed. Five minutes later Don Manuel and his men were tearing along in pursuit. Far below them they could see the sparks smit from the stones by the flying hoofs. It was a long chase in the night. At first the pursuers did not gain, but their horses were good and soon they began to creep up. The strength of a lasso is only that of its weakest strand, and Bonita was a tender mare. She was speedy, too, but not with the speed of the Paint Horse and she did not have his endurance. She began to tire. The father and his men did not fire for fear of killing the girl. They crept up within fifty yards. The breath of Bonita came sobbingly. Then Castro, who was bearing back hard upon the Paint Horse's bit, held him still more tightly and ranged by Bonita's side. His arm went around the girl's waist. The next moment, with her head on his bosom, she was resting upon the broad pommel of the bandit's saddle.

"'Ai! Caballo Pinto!' called Castro, with a laugh.

"With a bound, with a rush, with a swoop like the swoop of the prairie hawk down swooping for the quail, the Paint Horse was away. One short neigh of farewell he gave to Bonita, then bent to his work. The beating of his hoofs was like the rataplan of a drum on the mellow night. A stream of sparks floated up from the stony road. The wind sang in their ears. The stars were blurred above them. His ears were flat to his skull. The great mane floated back over the girl like a cloak. The reins were loose and Castro clasped his sweetheart with both arms. He drew his breath gaspingly. Don Manuel and his men saw only an empty road before them. Bonita had swerved and dashed into the chaparral. 'He has vanished!' said the soldiers, in wonder. It was so."

The mesquite fire had died down. Juan Gregorio paused. His tale was ended. No need to tell his hearers of Castro's mar-

riage, or how Bonita was found again, or how the bandit helped Mexico to win her independence, or how the Paint Horse of Seven Colors lived for many years.

“Si!” said all of the sheep shearers.

HOW THE GOOD SAINT CAME TO PANCHO.

Pancho Morales, six years old, black-eyed and round-paunched, nicknamed by an idolatrous mother, Pancho Bravo Bonito y Chico—Frank Brave Beautiful and Little—threw his chubby arms above his curly black head early on Christmas morning and peered from the pallet in the corner toward the fireplace of the dirt-chimney on the other side of the room. He expected things. He believed in his mother, who spanked him one moment and caressed him the next, and she had told him of the coming of the good saint whom the English call Santa Claus.

Pancho lived in a jacal down by the Rio Grande. A jacal is a hut built of crooked mesquite poles, driven upright into the ground, and roofed with "tules," which are water flags, dried and tough. The floor was

of dirt, the door, made of heavy planks, hung to rawhide hinges, there was one window with a single pane of glass, and no blind. One hundred yards away the turbid river rolled to the sea. The river was of grave interest to Pancho, because he was never allowed to go near it alone. It brought him many things to play with—driftwood of curious form, queer nuts and berries, carved bits of pine and all the flotsam of a stream of the wilderness. Sometimes in flood it swept down acres of vines with huge watermelons clinging to them. Pancho's father swam in and brought them out and piled them on the bank for him to dance around. In flood time Pancho was specially warned to keep away from the river, which sang all the night with a hollow, rushing sound. It was always in a hurry then to get to the sea.

About the hut in which Pancho lived were sand hills, swathed in mesquite and chaparral. Giant cacti reared misshapen forms around him. The huisache bore yellow blossoms faintly sweet and the cat-

claw flowered into white after each infrequent rain. Its perfume is the sweetest of perfumes.

Pancho was only six, but he was "brave and beautiful," and he wandered at will through the chaparral in all directions, save toward the river. He knew the track of the leopard cat. He had trapped the blue quail that has a crimson topknot. He had chased the chaparral cock, which easily outran him. He knew where the rabbits burrowed in the sand. In the wooden cage which hung over his pallet were two "palomitas," little doves no longer than a man's thumb, which cooed just as the American dove coos. He knew which of the cacti contained water and which of the "pear apples" were good to eat. If Pancho had been lost in the chaparral, he would not have starved or died of thirst, as sometimes happens to persons much older than he.

On this Christmas morning as he stared around he saw his mother sitting by the fire, with her face in her hands and her long black hair hanging to the dirt floor. Pan-

cho thought she was asleep, and tiptoed to her. He threw his arms about her neck and shouted in her ear. She clasped him in her arms, and then he saw that she had been crying. She kissed him passionately and murmured: "Pancho chico, Pancho bonito."

Pancho did not ask her why she wept. His eyes were rounded in astonishment at the many things that he saw, and he knew that they were for him. Truly the good saint had found his way to that far hut upon the Rio Grande.

To begin with, there was a crimson scarf of most beautiful silk, which Pancho was to wear about his waist; there was a pair of tiny buckskin trousers, with a fringe down the outside of the legs; there was a tiny sombrero, heavily bound with silver braid; there was a pair of shiny boots with red tops; there was a black velvet jacket, also trimmed with braid; there was a small lariat, plaited of colt's hide; there was a little silver spur; there was a pocket knife; there were sweetmeats of many kinds, chief

among them "peloncillo," crude brown sugar, in a stick as big as Pancho's plump leg; dearer than all was a package of American store candy, striped in red, white and blue; there were firecrackers; there was a picture of the Virgin and Child, done in gaudy red and blue color and rudely framed. Pancho did not know it, but all of the things were of a non-perishable kind. They had been brought a long way into that far country. On the other side of the fireplace were things for his mother, rich stuffs for gowns, combs and brushes, and perfumes in cheap, gaudy bottles. It occurred to Pancho that the good saint had forgotten the father, and he had made up his mind to share with him, when he saw a new Winchester rifle standing in the corner. From it depended in a new belt a new revolver. There were some bottles of strong liquors also, and packs of playing cards, as well as a waterproof coat and a massive, gaudily ornamented bridle. Pancho's father, who was a dark, strong man not more than thirty years old, still slept heavily, for

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he had worked hard and ridden hard in the past night.

The child danced up and down excitedly in his mother's arms. "Oh, gracias, madre mia!" he cried. "Gracias, padre mio! Gracias, buen Dios! Gracias, Virgen Maria."

The little doves in the wooden cage cooed softly. The mother shuddered, and glanced fearfully at the long form on the pallet that began to stir and mutter. The sun coming up gilded the tops of the mesquite that grew on the summit of the eastward hill. Some ranch chickens scratched busily in the sand outside. The clucking of the hens came through the window. The shrill whistle of the quail sounded from the chaparral. From overhead came the scream of a questing hawk. A coyote, which had yelped about the hut all night, slunk away into the cactus. The murmur of the river was stilled in the noises of Christmas Day.

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Pancho's mother unbarred the heavy door and let in a flood of sunlight. It

plunged into the dark room and fell upon the sleeping form of her husband. He stirred and sat up, his black hair falling into his eyes. He was not fully awake and muttered that "it weighed much." He had removed only his outer clothing, and across the soiled bosom of his shirt was a heavy smear of something dark. There were splashes of this dark on his sleeves. There were particles of it under his finger nails. His trousers, which lay on the floor, were stained with it. So were the heavy riding boots tumbled into a corner. So was the saddle which lay upon the floor. He saw these things, and shrugged his shoulders impatiently.

"It could not be helped," he growled, "A little sand and water for the leather; for the clothes the fire. Pancho, my loved one, come to thy father."

The child ran to him with an infantile cry of delight, and was gathered into his strong arms. Its soft cheek lay against the dark stain on his bosom. The mother looked at them with wide, frightened eyes.

"Dost like the pretty things, my little one?" asked the father, cuddling him, "the pretty things that the good saint hath brought thee?"

"Ai! Ai!" said Pancho. "The good saint that loves thee and me."

"That loves thee and me," repeated the father. "How else could the things be here, my Panchito?"

"How else?" said Pancho, returning his kiss with childish fervor.

The wife took him roughly from his father's arms.

"Thy shirt is unclean," she said, briefly. "Is this a time for fooling?"

The man looked down shamefacedly. "Thy pardon, cara mia," he said. "It is so. I had forgotten."

He rose and threw the shirt and trousers and coat into the fire and moodily watched them burn. "I have others as good," he said.

Pancho rushed forward with a long stick which his mother used to stir the coals with, and tried to drag them from the

flames. "They are good clothes," he said, stoutly.

"Nay, nay, little one," said his father, raising him in his arms and kissing him again, "let them burn. I have better. They were old. It is the Christmas time. Shall we not be gay, you in your vaquero's suit that the saint brought, and I in my Sabbath dress? It is the Christmas time, my brave one."

"It is the Christmas time," repeated Panchito, glibly. "Let them burn. But it is a shame," he added, "to burn good clothes."

Again the mother took him to herself. "Thou art strangely forgetful, Ramon," she said; "thou hast not washed. Thy hands are stained."

The rough rider looked at his darkened nails and then at the child. "I was forgetful," he said, "but it is dry. It will not come off on his skin."

Outside against the wall of the hut, high above the leap of coyote or wolf, hung a wild turkey, whose glossy bronzed coat had not lost its color. It had been dead three

days, and was moved from side to side of the jacal to keep the sun from shining on it. This turkey Pancho's mother baked with cunning Mexican art in a little grave dug in the ground. It was stuffed with meal and seasoned with red pepper and just a pinch of wild sage. She had "comida," too, which is bread stewed in rich goat's milk with pepper, and "cabritas," or stewed kid's flesh with pepper, and "chili con carne," which is beef with pepper, and "huevas con savollas," a mixture of eggs and onions and grated cheese and, of course, pepper, and "enchiladas," which are tortillas, with onions and grated cheese and "chili con carne" gravy poured over them. She had "tamales" made according to a receipt that her grandmother had used, and "dulces," which are many kinds of home-made candies. She had cake, frosted with red sugar and thickly strewn with pecans, and a strange pudding, boiled in goat's milk, and strong black coffee, made from berries she had slowly parched between heated rocks, then ground in her "metate," which is a

large stone with a hollow scooped in the center, that has a pestle for grinder.

Pancho, in his buckskin trousers and black velvet jacket and red-topped boots and tiny sombrero, pottered about, throwing his colt's hide lariat at the chickens, or the pots and pans, or his mother, or his laughing father, who had drunk much of the strong liquor by this time, though he dodged the coils of the lasso with instinctive skill.

To Pancho, brave, handsome and little, this Christmas, which was marked by the first visit of the good saint, was a time to be remembered. Chuckles burst out of his fat little body all the morning long. He gave his father kisses, which he carried to his mother and brought back more in their stead. He embraced Ramon's long legs or clung to Antonia's gown until taken up and kissed again. He cooed in very joyousness of heart to the little doves, which cooed back again. He told tales of what he would do when he mounted his father's horse and drove him with the little silver

spur. He promised manfully never to go near the river. When he became a robber chieftain, he would buy wax candles and burn them for the good saint who had been kind to him. He would do a thousand things, and the recital of each of them ended with a fresh embrace. His father hummed low minor-chorded Mexican songs of love and war, and Pancho's thin little treble joined in. The mother, who seemed to have forgotten her sadness of the morning, was smilingly at work. She was used to her husband coming home with discolored garments. She had been married eight years and she could not say that he had not been a good husband to her. She loved him and she prayed for him with passionate fervor night and morning before the cheap little shrine which stood in one corner of the jacal.

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Meanwhile, upon a sand-bar three miles down the river, was a sightless Thing, with holes where there had been eyes, and a bullet wound in the back. Two yellow-

trimmed Mexican vultures, gorged to sleepiness, stood near it. A pink flamingo, with dignified stride, marched up and down and cocked an inquisitive eye. Little blue cranes gathered around it and seemed to debate what it did there and how best to get it away, since it lay with its legs in the river and interfered with the fishing. Doves that came down to water and were used to perch upon the bar, hurried by with a swift shrill tremor of wing. A blue quail buzzed from the shore, lit by its head, bounded into the air with a startled whir and was gone. Coyotes from the undergrowth looked at it longingly, but the swift water was between, and the coyote, which is the tramp of the cactus, hates water. Above the Thing which was on the sand-bar hovered a cloud of huge green flies—"screw flies" they are called in that country, because they lay an egg under the skin, which hatches a worm, which bores or screws its way into the flesh and brings agony and death. The Thing was dressed in the rough strong clothing of the wayfarer and over the shoulders was a

crease which showed where the straps of the peddler's pack had sometimes pressed. The pockets were turned out. It had come down in the night, landing softly without a jar, and waited there patiently to fester and bleach in the sun, or, when the river willed, to resume its journey to the sea. The afternoon was growing old and the sun had plunged far to the west. The face of the Thing was already swollen and purple, because the climate of the Rio Grande does its work fast. In another day the mother that bore it could not tell it for her son.

In the night time a strange shape had kept it company for awhile, then had parted from it and gone downward. This shape, as it floated in the moonlight, had looked like a barrel with a couple of projections sticking from it. Sometimes it rolled over and then it had four giant arms, which were held up in appeal to the heavens. It had grazed the sand-bar and lingered a moment in hesitation, but started again and swirled steadily southward. Pieces were bitten

from it here and there by huge ravenous gars, or undersized crocodiles. Sometimes it was dragged under, but came to the surface again, and the silver water ran down its sides. The strange shape, that was like and unlike a barrel, had been a packhorse in its time, faithful and earnest, and it had loved the Thing upon the sand-bar, but now its throat was deeply cut and it was seaward bound.

A mile above the sand-bar the trail of two horses led down to the river's edge and stopped there. A little blood sprinkled the dry grass. In more than one place the ground was marked with hoofs. A temporary halt had been made. This was plain to three men who had found the double trail and followed it to its ending. They were white men, and they looked curiously at the ground. Try as they might, they could not find a hoof print which led away from the river. One of them was spoken to as "Sergeant." All of them had the Winchester under the stirrup leather, the six-shooter at hip, and the quiet weather-

beaten face which mark the Texas ranger.

The Sergeant said: "Somebody's been hurt and stopped here to bleed. Mexicans, sure. They might belong on this side and might belong on that. If they belong here, they went into the water and swam some and took the bank lower down. Anyhow, the ground's dry and we couldn't find the trail. If they belong l'otro lado (the other side) they are somewhere in Tamaulipas and I hope they'll stay there. Pity they aren't dead." Then the three men rode away.

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A flood came down the river in the dark and the Thing on the sand-bar followed after the strange shape, which was trying to reach the Gulf.

That night Pancho lay curled on the pallet, with the tiny sombrero, and the velvet jacket, and the buckskin trousers, and the silver spur, and the colt's hide lariat piled so near that he could touch them if he woke. His father leaned over him fondly and tickled him softly with a roughened forefinger.

The boy opened his black eyes sleepily and smiled.

"Hast thou been very happy the day, higitio mio?"

"Ai! Ai!" said Pancho. "Thanks to the good saint."

** Ah! so like the
Missions, will stab
me for a Pass!*

THE END.



